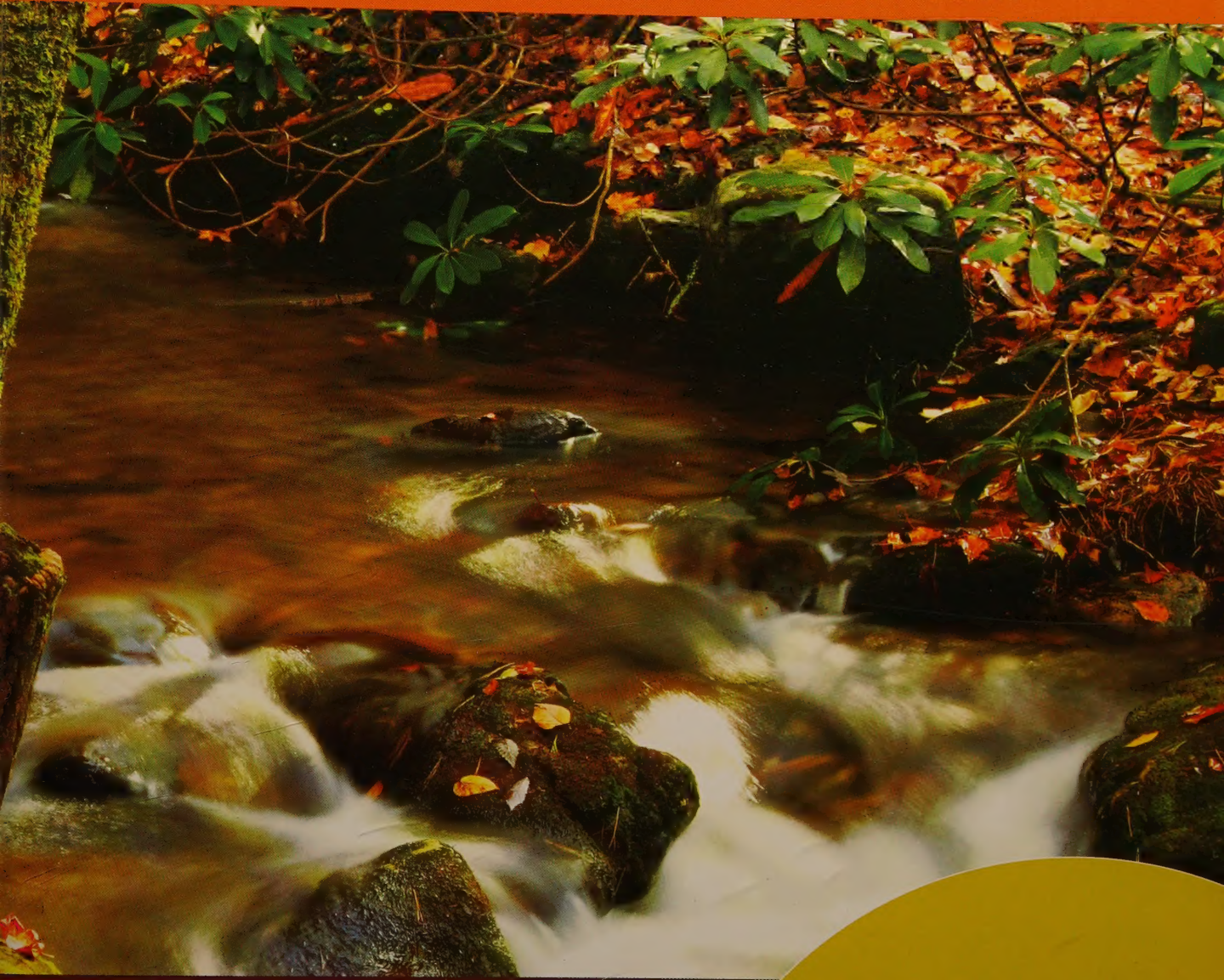


HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 32 : Number Three : Fall 2011



EMBRACING CHANGE

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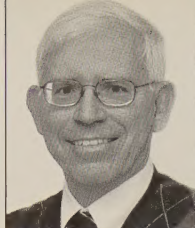
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Manuscripts are received with the understanding that they have not been previously published and are not currently under consideration elsewhere. Feature articles should be limited to 4,500 words (15 double-spaced pages), with no more than 6 recommended readings; filler items of between 500 and 1,000 words will be considered. All accepted material is subject to editing. When quoting the Bible, the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is preferred.

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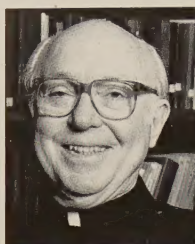
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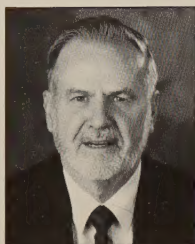
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The quarterly magazine HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (ISSN 0197-3096) is published by Regis University. Subscription rate: United States and Canada, \$49.00; all other countries, \$53.00. Online subscription: \$24.00 for one year. Single copies: United States and Canada, \$10.00 plus shipping; all other countries, \$10.00 plus shipping. Non-profit postage rate paid in Denver, Colorado. Postmaster: Send address changes to HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. HD, Denville, NJ 07834. Copyright 2011 by HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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Letters to the editor and all other correspondence may be sent to: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE, P.O. Box 217, Old Saybrook, CT 06475. Phone: (203) 809-0840 / E-mail: jesedcntr@aol.com

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Editor's Page

Embracing Change

For me, one of the simple joys of the fall season is the chance to curl up in front of the fireplace and contemplate the flames. I like to build the fire as large as possible and watch it burn down, then to re-stoke it with new logs as the cycle repeats itself. There is an endless fascination in watching the flames catch new pieces of wood, engulf and consume them, and then collapse the logs into embers. As the intensity of the heat at the core of the fire increases, it reaches me with its comforting warmth.

While the elemental power of fire is something that we in the contemporary world can appreciate, we do not experience it in the same way as people once did. The ancients recognized four basic elements: water, wind, earth and fire. For many of them, fire was the primary element because it was the most necessary for the sustenance of life. The elements were not only part of common experience, they were the subject of philosophical discourse as well.

Among the ancient Greeks various philosophers argued for the predominance of a particular element. Heraclitus, a native of Ephesus around 500 B.C., argued persuasively for the primacy of fire because it expressed what for him was the primary reality of life: change. "All things are an interchange for fire, and fire for all things, just like goods for gold and gold for goods," he wrote. He is known as the philosopher of "flux and fire" and is the one who coined the phrase, "You cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you."

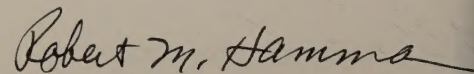
This issue of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT** focuses on change. While we may not agree with Heraclitus that change is the primary reality of life, we will undoubtedly have to agree that it is an ever present and inescapable dimension of life. Change comes upon us, welcome and unwelcome. We long for change, yet we fear it. We resist change, then accept it. The prospect of change causes all kinds of conflicting emotions to well up in us: discomfort, relief, uncertainty, hope, anger, joy, regret and happiness. Change is a reality that we cannot ignore. Indeed, the more we try to ignore it, the greater the impact it will have on us.

It is only when we come to terms with the ever present reality of change—what Buddhists call the impermanence of life—that we can begin to live creatively through change. It is then that we can recognize that change is not simply the impact of impersonal forces upon us, like flames that consume the logs willy-nilly. Change rather is the medium in which we search for grace. It is in the constancy of change that we seek the voice of the One who is changeless. In the midst of change we remember the confident words of Paul, "All things work together for the good of those who love God. . . . What will

separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:28, 35).

Some five hundred years after Heraclitus told the people of Ephesus, "that all things come into being and pass away through strife," Paul encouraged them to trust not in their own ability to deal with change but to place their hope in "him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20).

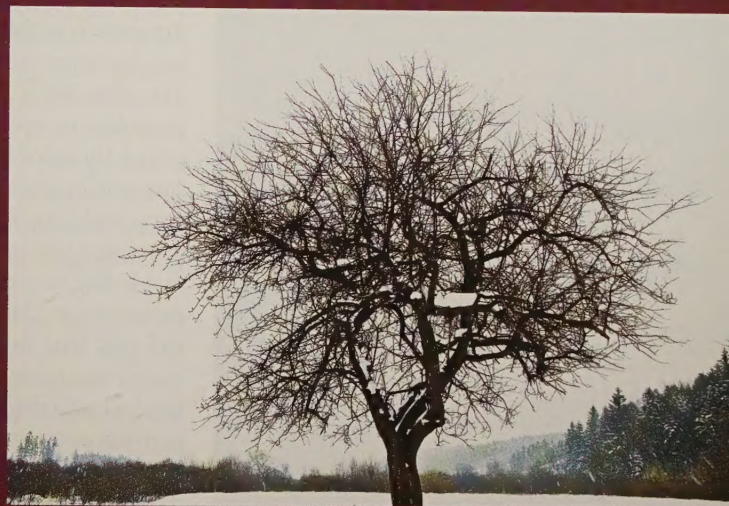
When I was soliciting articles for this volume of **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**, one of the eventual contributors wrote to me, "You certainly like big issues." Change is, indeed, a big issue. So much of psychology and spirituality arise from the human challenge of coping with change. The articles in this issue are not an attempt to provide an overarching view of change, but simply to offer perspectives on ways that readers can embrace change in their own lives, minister to others who experience the difficulty of making or accepting change, and lead their communities through the challenges of adapting and growing through the changes they face.



Robert M. Hamma



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PROMOTING PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL CHANGE AND GROWTH

Kevin McClone, Psy.D.

Life is all about change. Sometimes that change is the result of external circumstances such as our recent U.S. economic downturn, traumatic natural disasters, job loss or a sudden illness. Some changes come as we transition through the life cycle stages of growth. At other times change comes in the form of a relationship breakup or some addictive pattern or over-dependency that leaves us feeling stuck and unable to cope. Some changes involve our active pursuit of change and growth such as learning a new skill, overcoming a bad habit or entering a new profession. Whether these changes are thrust upon us by external circumstances or involve desired choices, the challenge is never an easy one and more lasting and meaningful change takes time, perseverance and courage. Our personal responses to change can either propel us to further growth or deeper stagnation, depending on how we respond to these changing realities.

Two authors, James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, who dealt extensively with the dynamics of addiction and change, found that for change to be most effective, it must be seen in a holistic context where any single pattern of behavior occurs within the realm of a person's entire life. Therefore changing habits has important implications for multiple areas of our life. A holistic perspective is needed in order to understand fully the process of human intentional behavioral change. This holistic perspective involves the current life situation, one's cognitive beliefs and attitudes, social relationships and enduring personal characteristics. In other words, change is most effective when all of these areas are addressed in some meaningful way. For example, the person who struggles to overcome an obsessive compulsive pattern like overeating or substance abuse comes to realize over time that to maintain longer term recovery they need to change their whole life situation, beliefs, relationships and even some fundamental characteristics of their personality. Likewise, those most susceptible to relapse into addiction have fewer social supports, stay stuck in old beliefs and cling to dysfunctional or unhealthy relationships.

Indeed the mystery of the human condition's struggle with change is well captured in this famous quote attributed to St. Paul, "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Romans 7:19).

Fullness of life and love comes when we find the grace to embrace the many changes of life. I myself have a love/hate relationship with change. I have both welcomed and resisted change in its many forms. I can recall some positive changes that I made in my life and many experiences of avoiding change out of fear, anxiety, or lack of confidence. All of these experiences give me the opportunity to learn about the process of coping with change. When I have been more open to change in my life, more willing to seek the good and the growth in this new situation, my life has become more full and abundant. Yet, often the fear or anxiety that change provokes in me reflects my own perceived threat of loss. What will this new situation be like? How can I manage and cope with this new reality? At times I fear some loss of identity or self-image that I cling to protect. As much as I have grown in my life because of change, I still find that my first impulse is often one of resistance. Indeed change is often marked with discomfort and anxiety and in many cases may be quite painful. As a result, I may feel drawn to escape or retreat to the seemingly safe grounding of old predictable behaviors and patterns. Yet in reflecting on my own resistance and that of many of my clients in therapy, I can see that while understandable, resistance, when pervasive, only serves to inhibit my growth and in many cases lead to further regression.

Have you ever wondered how some people seem to make changes in their life in the direction of positive growth with relative ease and others seem doomed to repeat old patterns despite their best intentions? Why is change so difficult for me and so many others? Why do I so deeply desire to make changes and yet why is it so hard? I find hope in the scriptures. Indeed the mystery of the human condition's struggle with change is well captured in this famous quote attributed to St. Paul, "For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Romans 7:19). Like St. Paul, at times we adapt well to changes in our lives and seek growth and new life and at other times resist it and move toward stagnation and old regressed modes of behavior.

What is your own honest stance toward growth and change? Do you

recognize change as a normal, natural, and necessary part of life? Do you seek to be curious and creative amidst the often chaotic feelings that surround significant change or instead run for the hills in fear and anxiety? In this article, I will explore how the three key psycho-spiritual principals of awareness, acceptance and action can contribute to a meaningful and positive experience of change. I will end by examining several barriers that can undermine that movement toward positive change and growth.

PRINCIPLE 1: AWARENESS

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." (Leo Tolstoy)

"A human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don't know ourselves! Why, thirty or forty skins, as thick and as hard as an ox's or bear's, cover the soul. Go into your ground and learn to know yourself there." (Meister Eckhart)

Awareness is a fundamental principle of holistic psycho-spiritual change and growth. Just what needs to change often seems mysterious to us. Yet, it's hard to change if we don't know the problem or what it is that needs to change. In psychology we believe that an accurate assessment of the problem or an accurate diagnosis is the beginning of successful change and intervention. So a growing self-awareness is crucial. Many people come to counseling or spiritual direction aware that they are not at peace and desire some change or better way of coping with changing circumstances, but may feel stuck or lost as to how to proceed. At times their awareness is strong but often it may be vague and illusive. I have come to believe that the desire to change by reaching out for help marks an important first step. Gradually in a relationship of trust, people begin to listen more deeply to the still voice within that yearns to change in the same way that a flower draws toward the sun to grow and blossom. Indeed much

of therapy and spiritual direction seeks to create an environment that allows the natural impulse for growth and new life to spring forth.

The more we are able to reflect honestly on our lives and patterns of behavior, the more our own self-awareness and mindfulness deepens. The goal here is to see reality as it is, not as we wish it to be, but truly as it really is. As Thomas Merton stated, "there is no spirituality divorced from reality." The more that we come to embrace our truest selves with our strengths and limitations in a more balanced perspective, the deeper and more authentic our spirituality becomes.

Change and growth flow from trusting relationships. In fact, most research on success in therapy has consistently shown that the factor that most contributes to change in a positive growth direction is not the method of therapy, but the quality of the relationship between the client and therapist. To become aware means to slow down and limit the various distractions and noise that keep a person from deeper self-awareness. In this fast-paced age of cyber-technology and information overload, quiet spaces are rare and must be consciously pursued. Solitude is often the birthing place of more intimate connections with self, others and God. Yet this solitude must be actively pursued. Those most fearful of change often avoid solitude for it confronts them with the enemy in the mirror, themselves. Spiritual writers often speak of this process as uncovering the true self and recognizing the false self. Jungian perspectives would speak of the persona or shadow-self that masks our deeper and truer identity. So as we slowly discover our deepest selves, we begin to change and grow in the direction of that which we most deeply value.

The problem is that we often look in the wrong places for how to change and grow. We expect others to change to suit us or wait for situations to get better. Yet how we think about, perceive and process events in life can make a huge difference. For me the first and most crucial step in effective behavioral change is this principle of awareness. This involves awareness of self, others, God and the world around me. How is this awareness developed? This is where

a psycho-spiritual disciplined practice of some sort comes into the picture. The examples are many: from journaling to daily meditations, to liturgy of the hours, to centering prayer, mindfulness practice in daily life and disciplined moments of attention. This can happen in the course of a busy life but demands a commitment to living consciously in the here and now.

For one client, a compulsive overeater, change came when she risked sharing her pain with a trusted other and joined a twelve-step recovery group for overeaters. Another discovered that change meant becoming more honest and aware of her tendency to run into unhealthy relationships with men as a way to avoid being alone. She gradually realized that her pattern only served to keep her from getting to know her deeper self and breaking the long-standing codependent cycle.

Part of awareness is the proper vision of possibilities. One way to discover this is through quiet times, silent spaces and retreat. Without such practice or built-in daily reflection change is difficult to sustain. In deepening awareness there is the opportunity to probe one's defenses, self-deception, and false self in order to uncover deeper truths and respond to the impulse to grow and change in positive directions. Thomas Merton speaks of this positive silence in his book *Love and Living* as "what pulls us together and makes us realize who we are, who we might be, and the distance between these two." It is what Paul Tillich called the "courage to be." In this disciplined creative silence, as we come face to face with ourselves in the lonely ground of our own being, we confront many questions about the value of our existence, the reality of our commitments, and the authenticity of our everyday lives. (Merton, 1979).

PRINCIPLE 2: ACCEPTANCE

No real meaningful change happens without coming to acceptance. So once we become more fully aware of our deepest selves, we still have a fundamental choice rooted in our human freedom to deny this awareness or to embrace and accept it and thus pave the way toward meaningful action

and authentic change. Accepting challenges while still feeling fear, anxiety, and lack of confidence is no easy task. We are often drawn to what is familiar, and what is new can be frightening. Acceptance allows us to move toward serenity and peace of mind despite so many changes beyond our control. It allows us to direct our energies to courageously face the challenges of life by changing those things that we can while letting go of what we can't change.

Having worked with many recovering persons caught in the throws of addictive patterns, coming to acceptance is often a long and painful process that may include many relapses into old behaviors despite one's best intentions and desires. What factors help us to grow to accept our present reality and move forward toward positive growth and change? One principle of meaningful acceptance is a willingness to embrace our limitations and to ask others for help. For example, in addiction dynamics, no real meaningful change happens in one's recovery until a person hits bottom in which they become "sick and tired of being sick and tired." This is often the point at which the pain of continuing the addictive cycle becomes so great that it trumps their fear of change.

Acceptance implies a fundamental shift in perspective from blaming others to taking responsibility for oneself. As long as I look outside of myself to criticize, blame and react to others, I fail to take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings and behavioral actions. To grow in acceptance allows us to discover who are our real friends and support. They are loved ones, be they spouses, family members, religious community members, counselors or spiritual guides who have the courage to challenge and confront us to grow to be our best selves. While I would like to say that I welcomed those changes prompted by trusted others, the truth is that I often viewed their promptings as intrusive and reacted defensively. At times, I would even blame the person calling me to change rather than face my own imperfections. This is where the relationship with self is crucial. Change involves growth in self-esteem and self-acceptance. Unless I can accept my

own weaknesses and failings, I will be hindered in my efforts to change and grow. This is where many people get stuck. It's not enough to have supportive others, we must feel good about ourselves and our abilities. This is what psychologists often refer to as self-efficacy.

PRINCIPLE 3: ACTION

"Every life is lived toward a horizon, a distant vision of what lies ahead. The quality of our action depends heavily on whether that horizon is dark with death or full of light and life." (Parker Palmer)

The fruit of one's awareness and acceptance becomes manifest in acts of truth, justice and love. The choice before us is to change and grow in the direction of life and love but we often choose death out of fear and trembling. William Bridges (2003), a leading author in the study of transition and change, aptly points out that every change starts with an ending and moves toward a new beginning through a wilderness of liminality he calls the neutral zone. What makes it hard to act in the disciplined movement of change is the fear of letting go of what was familiar. This demands some grief, letting go, and entry into the wilderness and liminality that mark all transitions. The bridge from the familiar to the not yet demands faith and hope in the promise of new life. This psycho-spiritual journey is often too overwhelming for people whose past wounds have blocked their ability to trust.

"He who moves not forward goes backward." (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

Positive change and growth involves taking some action and not standing still. Indeed to stand still is to move backwards. Even letting go is a process that demands some action. Many clients I have worked with in therapy often wonder why they keep repeating the same patterns over and over again. Often when we explore why change didn't happen or happen as expected it was because they failed to

take some action or follow up with some homework assignment or commitment. The truth is that change demands disciplined practice and new behaviors. One person described his regression every time he returned to his mother's home by saying, "Even though I'm a grown man, when I return to see my mother, I feel and act like I'm five years old." He found it hard to take suggestions on setting boundaries with his mother for fear of offending her and then complained every time he went back to visit. His resentment just grew more intense. It was only when he gradually came to react differently and limited his visits that he was able to experience change in the relationship.

"Some people change when they see the light, others when they feel the heat." (Caroline Schoeder)

Sometimes we are drawn to action through insight and illumination and sometimes because it just hurts too much to continue our resistance and old patterns. Some changes have happened in our lives as a way to avoid pain, further hurt or suffering. At other times what is moving us to change is our higher aspirations and vision of who we wish to be. In other words, at times we change because we are sick and tired of the same old behaviors or we desire to be more real and authentic in line with our deeper values. In many cases both motivations may be operating where the person desires both to avoid the pain of hurtful relationships while also seeking healthy and whole relationships in line with his or her higher aspirations.

One client shared with me how he grew to become more assertive by making the connection with how his past painful experiences of abuse blocked his capacity to trust and led to patterns of reacting to life rather than being proactive and taking responsible action. This reactive pattern limited his capacity for more intimate relationships with self, others and God. As he grew more to trust and share this pain and its impact in the present moment he came to embrace and own his grief and seek active healing. The problem with our past wounds is that they often block us from growing, yet the good news is that

the combined effect of deepening awareness, willing acceptance and creative and persistent action help to foster psycho-spiritual change and growth in the direction of our deepest call to love.

When we become aware of both the pain of old unhealthy habits and the desire for becoming more real and whole we are setting the stage to accept and embrace all of who we really are but also take the necessary action to become the persons that we wish to be. As the famous Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu said, "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading." This is the challenge of genuine growth and change. In fact there is a well respected principle of change that uses the acronym of **GROW**, which is as follows:

- **GOAL SETTING:**
Clarifying the goal, breaking it down into manageable steps
- **REALITY:**
Considering where you are now and what is the gap. What resources can you tap into?
- **OPTIONS:**
Considering the different options to reach your goal
- **WAY FORWARD:**
Deciding on an action plan and sticking to it. Celebrating success and adjusting the plan as necessary.

OBSTACLES TO GROWTH AND CHANGE

Now that we have reflected on awareness, acceptance and action as three principles of psycho-spiritual change and growth, I will explore some of the key obstacles that seem to block that process of positive change and growth. Change doesn't come easily and to improve we must continually embrace change. There is a law of physics that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Two of the key barriers to growth and change are **denial and self-deception** that cloud our awareness and create a sort of blindness. A common way this is done is by blaming others for my situation. In psychological circles we might say the person has an **external locus of control**. A locus of control orientation is a belief about whether the outcomes

of our actions are contingent on what we do (internal control orientation) or on events outside our personal control (external control orientation). In other words, what blocks my awareness and responsiveness is a **misdirected attention that lets me off the hook**. If I can lay the fault outside of me (external locus of control), then others need to change, not me. As Meister Eckhart said, "Why do you look without for that which is within?"

The maturing person embraces change and growth as a natural part of life and takes responsibility for one's choices and responses to life. Victor Frankl, survivor of Nazi concentration camps and the author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, has reminded us that we always have a right to choose life, even in the midst of the most unspeakable horrors and death. Yet we know that **we can often resist change, become lazy or irresponsible, look for excuses, procrastinate**, and get caught up in various other fears and defenses. Indeed change takes us out of our comfort zone and we often feel threatened that we will lose something. The more we face change, the more the resistance we feel and the harder it is to change.

Another of the common barriers to personal growth and development is **past failures or wounds**. Often our past failures or bad events in our lives get in the way of personal growth and development. It is natural for our minds to dwell on such events, but only by moving past them can we truly grow as people and in our careers. Those negative incidents and wounds from the past must be put aside or healed in some meaningful way so we can accomplish our goals. This is no easy task, especially with victims of abuse or other traumas. Healing and change may be slow and arduous.

Fear is a major obstacle to change and growth and the one I hear people report most often in one form or another. We fear the unfamiliar and the new and cling to old habits and ways of being. We may fear a loss of self, for each major life change and loss calls forth a challenge to relearn our world. There is the powerful fear of ridicule and shame that makes us want to hide and escape. For some others it is the fear of success. Whatever the fear, the only way to

overcome it is to become more aware of it, embrace it and courageously take some action one day at a time to face it head on. This allows us to continue the process of growth through a gradual process of risk-taking actions. We expand our limited comfort zones and become more able to cope with life's changes. What change teaches us is that when we go with the flow rather than resist we grow and develop and when we resist we stunt our growth. Acceptance tells us that fear will always be there as long as we are alive.

Another key obstacle is a **lack of mentors or role models** who can assist us in the process of growth and change. Many twelve-step recovery groups witness to the powerful impact of having sponsors as mentors who with years of previous sobriety can model and guide newcomers into recovery through their own example of how they are changing one a day at a time. We all need people to rely on to share with and to learn from. Perhaps you want to identify a particular person to be a change partner who you see as accomplished in an area you desire to grow in. Accountability to another may be helpful. It is a key action step and found in relationships with formators, spiritual directors, counselors, coaches, mentors and other guides.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In sum, we are called to a generative vocation to embrace love and life to the full. This call is one that demands a deepening intimacy with self, others and God. An intimacy that, as Erik Erikson notes, allows us to meet the demands for change in ways that don't compromise our personal integrity. This growing intimacy assists us in being able to embrace life's many changes and challenges. Here courage and perseverance are key. Keeping our eye on the goal and not losing heart is crucial. Remembering what was driving us initially and recapturing the vision of love can keep us from giving in. Teachers, mentors, counselors and spiritual directors committed to our psycho-spiritual growth and positive change can assist us greatly on the journey by cultivating an atmosphere of care and openness that allow the seeds of deeper awareness, acceptance and action to be watered and to blossom.

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Reframing for

The Use of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and


Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything is worthy of praise, dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).

For many years ministers have employed the findings of psychology in their work. With parishioners, youth, the elderly, in religious formation programs and other venues, various psychodynamic approaches (Freudian, Jungian and object-relations theory) concerned with the past and the unconscious have been utilized in the service of pastoral/spiritual guidance.

However at this juncture, ministry needs to incorporate not just past understandings of the human condition, but also must seek to employ other more recent advances in psychology to foster the pastoral care functions of healing, nurturing, guiding, reconciling and change. This can be done by employing the findings and publications on both cognitive-behavioral therapy and positive psychology.

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THEORY

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) provides insights into why people feel the way they do and how both affect (mood) and behavior are determined to a great extent by



Change:

The Psychology in Pastoral Ministry and Formation

Robert J. Wicks, Psy.D. and Tina C. Buck

their cognitions and beliefs (schemata). Given this, effort needs to be made in ministry and formation programs to help people experiencing distress to examine their own cognitions (ways of thinking, perceiving and understanding) to see what distortions might be present that are causing the individual difficulties. In addition, there is interest in CBT to have people engage in behavior that would have a positive impact on their feelings—even if, sometimes *especially* if, their inclinations are to do nothing. (An example of this is when people are “feeling down” or actually experiencing clinical depression. While the belief may be, “I really don’t have the energy to go out or interact with others,” they are encouraged to do so because depression and activity don’t have to live together.)

Cognitive-behavioral therapy recognizes that psychological problems are often negatively impacted by dysfunctional thinking. Originally developed by Aaron Beck in the 1960s, this short-term, structured psychotherapy was first used with clients suffering from depression but has since been expanded to include other mood disorders, trauma, substance abuse, and the improvement of everyday living in our desire to respond more fully to God (which is of particular interest to us here). The underlying assumption is that life experiences create core beliefs and schemas (a way of responding based on one’s relationship to self, others and God). These, in turn, drive intermediate beliefs which are personal rules, attitudes and assumptions. And so, when an incident occurs, automatic thoughts are generated that impact behavior and mood.

Cognitive theory and therapy can be helpful because there is a bias for action and an emphasis on working with the present as a way to alleviate the symptoms of psychic distress as quickly as possible. As a result, pastoral ministers/formators and those whom they guide are invited by this theory to collaborate on identifying a dysfunctional cognition based on a core belief and working on decreasing negative affect while increasing coping skills related to the negative, unexamined, automatic thoughts the person may have.

Distorted thoughts can come in a variety of different forms. Examples include *catastrophizing* (I am going to lose everything), *magnifying* (this is the worse thing that could ever happen to me), *overgeneralizing* (everyone thinks this way about me), *jumping to conclusions*, *selective negative focus*, *emotional reasoning*, “*shoulds*,” *polarized (all or nothing) thinking* (if we don’t do it my way, it is wrong) and *personalizing* (he doesn’t like me because I didn’t go out to lunch with him). While many people may fall into using this type of unexamined, negative thinking from time-to-time, it becomes especially problematic when it becomes the default way of thinking. Unfortunately, this may happen when someone is at a low point during their spiritual life, formation program, or day.

Negative thinking is quite common and it is easier to give it more weight than anything positive. Often we can hear a compliment or affirmation only to have it dissolve when negative stones are thrown and hit their mark. Thus, it is important that people be educated to recognize negative thinking in order to link it to depressive or anxious feelings that may result. Then, the negative self-talk can be replaced with a more realistic thought or belief. In addition, the use of realistic positive language is central to helping people make changes.

Generally, it is easy to find something negative about ourselves and even easier to make negative comparisons with others. However, maintaining perspective in light of these challenges is where the real work begins. Rainer Maria Rilke, in *Letters to a Young Poet*, offers:

Only someone who is ready for everything, who excludes nothing, not even the most enigmatical, will live the relation to another as something alive and will himself draw exhaustively from his own existence. For if we think of this existence of the individual as a larger or smaller room it appears evident that most people learn to know only one corner of their room, a place by the window, a strip of floor on which they will walk up and down. Thus they have a certain security. And yet that dangerous insecurity is so much more human which drives the prisoner in Poe’s stories to feel out the shapes of their horrible dungeons and not be strangers to the unspeakable terror of their abode. We, however, are not prisoners. No traps or snares are set about us, and there is nothing which should intimidate or worry us. . . . We have no reason to mistrust our world, for it is not against us. Has it terrors, they are our terrors; has it abysses, those abysses belong to us; are dangers at hand, we must try to love them.

To accomplish this depth of self-awareness so that change becomes more readily possible, a number of steps can be either taken by oneself or with a spiritual director, formator or

counselor. They include: exploring the cognitive appraisal of an event, revisiting the emotional arousal it caused, and examining the resulting behavior that one undertook. As part of this recollecting process, it is important that both the objective (what actually happened) and the subjective (what beliefs and judgments one has made about the event) be examined. With this process the person can then be encouraged to uncover the style of her/his thinking process as well as examine the accuracy of the conclusions being made.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Another even more recent advance in the behavioral sciences that can be helpful in pastoral ministry and formation is positive psychology. Its goal is to encourage the field of clinical psychology not to see itself as merely being a “repair shop” for emotional difficulties (as important as this role is), but also to help people uncover their signature strengths. By drawing attention to people’s gifts, talents and virtues, people can then build upon what is good instead of solely focusing on correcting what is problematic.

The discipline of positive psychology is about living well. It is prevention-focused and works to expand existing competencies. It looks at people’s past experiences and how they have adapted to become who they are today. It also examines their sense of personal contentment and how their attitudes and optimism influence their future. By taking this perspective, people are encouraged to question themselves professionally and personally in a whole new way. According to Martin Seligman (2002), initiator of the contemporary positive psychology movement:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about positive subjective experience: well-being and satisfaction (past); flow, joy, the sensual pleasures, and happiness (present); and constructive cognitions about the future—optimism, hope, and faith. At the individual level it is about positive personal traits—the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, high talent, and wisdom Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is wrong; it is also building what is right . . . the major strides in prevention have largely come from a perspective focused on systematically building competency, not correcting weakness . . . This, then, is the general stance of positive psychology toward prevention. It claims that there is a set of buffers against psychopathology: the positive human traits.

Positive psychology is not a psychological “concealer” that hides the real blemishes of life, nor is it an emotional or spiritual cortisone that temporarily eliminates unpleasant life experiences. Instead, it is a more dynamic way for people to view their state of being and be freed from the bindings of a solely negative focus. Although positive psychology is centered upon the individual, it also integrates the strengths of supporting institutions such as families, schools and churches so it is a natural approach for persons involved in pastoral ministry.



Positive and negative emotions are designed to have specific purposes in our lives. Too much of one without the other to balance it could be problematic. Peterson (2006) notes that:

Negative emotions alert us to danger. When we experience a negative emotion, our response options narrow, and we act with haste to avoid whatever danger is signaled. In contrast, positive emotions signal safety and our inherent response to them is not to narrow our options but to broaden and build upon them. The evolutionary payoff of positive emotions is therefore not in the here and now, but in the future. Perhaps it is advantageous to experience positive emotions because they lead us to engage in activities that add to our behavioral and cognitive repertoires.

Research has also shown that a positive outlook can contribute to longer, healthier lives, richer marriages, more productive work environments and closer friendships. In addition, this optimism improves resilience, strengthens coping skills and moves people from survival to enrichment.

One way to measure the richness of life is to consider the impact of "flow." Identified by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, this psychological state of being is the overlap of refined skill, single-mindedness and joy. For individuals who experience flow, time seems to stand still, there is no self-consciousness, and the activity brings a sense of completeness. By guiding novices, parishioners, students and others through a discovery process that highlights their most rewarding activities and encouraging a steady diet of them, we are better able to help them tap into the positive energy in and around them—what some of us would refer to as grace. Employing positive psychology as a tool in pastoral ministry offers a reflective grid,

then, that centers on experiences, events, behaviors, cognitions, gifts, talents and conditions to be recalled, celebrated and reinforced. By intentionally reviewing these contributions, greater insight can be achieved both personally and professionally with those that one guides. In the book *Bounce* (2006), one of the coauthors of this paper details a number of questions to guide such an exploration of "Positive Psychology and Self-Questioning Reflection." Likewise, he also includes recommended readings and simple suggestions based on positive psychology research that can strengthen well-being, foster flow, improve quality of life and increase happiness in a variety of ways.

Deriving honest meaning from our experiences and testing our perceptions can offer a freedom that may be unknown or elusive up to that point because of the negative beliefs being held. And so, it is with having both cognitive and positive psychology as a back drop (see additional resources on these areas listed at the end of the article) that we wish to now briefly discuss the concepts of reframing for change to see how they can be applied to pastoral ministry.

REFRAMING FOR CHANGE

Cognitive reframing is an intervention that helps a person create new meaning from distressing situations where irrational, distorted or imbalanced thinking has affected his/her behavior, mood or both. With the collaboration of a spiritual/psychological guide or on one's own, maladaptive thoughts or narrow ways of viewing events are identified and new ideas are generated to allow perception (and ultimately both feeling and behavior) to be modified even though the precipitating event actually remains the same.

Most dysfunctional thinking styles have taken a lifetime to develop and persons need adequate space to consider a re-conceptualization of their thinking and beliefs. This cycle of cognitive appraisal, emotional arousal and behavior is also continuous. Once again, the goal of reframing for change is not designed to deny realities but *to look into them with a sense of openness and hope*. Its goal is to help raise recognition as to where the persons being guided are in their cycle of change so as to bring it to light for them. With that awareness, people coming for guidance can begin connecting their maladaptive thoughts and incomplete or inaccurate personal assumptions. And by practicing reframing in spiritual direction, pastoral care or formation sessions, pastoral ministers can derive new insights and enhance their well-being.

The fundamental components of reframing for change in practice are: hear what persons are and are not saying, acknowledge what they are feeling and thinking, and help them to gain insight into the *full* experience. Often we debate whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. In reframing, our interest is in the entire glass, both the represented signature strengths and defenses/growing edges. The goal is not to eradicate the defenses or situational challenges, but to recognize them for what they are while simultaneously applauding the gifts in all parts of ourselves or the persons being guided. While looking at our unhelpful tendencies can be beneficial for growth, if we look at them *exclusively* then it will only lead to discouragement.

Just as mattes and frames can bring different details to the foreground in a painting, the use of CBT and positive psychology in the practice of reframing allows one to recast certain details of the story or shed light on faulty beliefs. And just as viewing a painting from a variety of angles brings perspective, the pastoral minister or formator becomes an observer of the "paintings" of the person being mentored. This helps the person become more fully self-aware in order to

secure or regain personal power, and to adopt new contexts for perceiving events, their vocation and life.

The practice of reframing benefits from a *sound relationship, openness and humor*. Regardless of what approaches to spiritual direction, formation or counseling are employed, the relationship is key. Although there are many psychological theories and techniques that can be used to intervene, studies have shown that it is the relationship between the helper and the person being guided that plays the most significant role in healing. Thus, rapport and a sense of trust are critical.

It can sometimes be difficult to decipher why an individual is stuck. Therefore, an open mind is also essential. From a psychological and spiritual point of view, the presenting problem noted by a person seeking support is not really the complete problem, so constant re-conceptualizing (as verbal and non-verbal information is presented) takes place. By embracing a "what if" mentality, some of the potential challenges being experienced can be illuminated. And finally, sometimes life can be taken far too seriously. By employing humor appropriately, a logjam of emotions can be released unexpectedly as well.

Reframing for change can be a powerful tool in helping individuals reshape their perceptions. However, even the most brilliant reframe can be rejected or stymied because of an individual's deep-rooted belief about himself/herself or the world. In the book *Crossing the Desert* (2007), we see some of the reasons why we can be our own worst support when negative thoughts refuse to be loosened. They include:

- Projecting the blame onto others because when we give away the blame we also give away the power to change or improve our situation.
- Condemning ourselves. God does not do this; when we do it, especially when we think we are simply being honest with ourselves about our faults, little hope remains for change.



- Discouragement that deflates us until there is no energy to move forward;
- Forms of anger, hurt, fear and lack of trust that keep us paralyzed from acting in a beneficial way.
- And, our most powerful enemy, a lack of humility, which prevents us from enjoying the fruits of a full awareness of both our true gifts and growing edges.

These resistances should be viewed with tenderness so they can be transformed into gifts. They offer windows into our personality and may be central to the reframing process. To unpack these gifts, practice, persistence and an appreciation that grace gives in sometimes unusual or unexpected ways are all essential. CBT and positive psychology are evidence-based theories that have been tested. With practice on self and others, they can add a new dimension to direction, advice-giving and counsel. They also offer a new path of exploration which may be uncharted, so gentle persistence may be necessary because there will be steps forward and back during the entire process of change. And finally, we must not forget that, in the end, no matter how efficacious our approach, it is in the end about experiencing grace. We are imperfect and our best intentions may fall short. Grace bridges those gaps and enriches the shared journey by encouraging us all to be open to “make all things new”—including ourselves.

REFRAMING FOR CHANGE IN THE PASTORAL SETTING

For pastoral ministers and spiritual directors, a little bit of knowledge can be a powerful thing in the case of the principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy and the approaches of positive psychology. For instance, knowing how systematic negative perceptions maintain negative emotions and dysfunctional behavior will lead the pastoral person or the formator to help those they are guiding to question their thinking and test the accuracy of the predictions/interpretations they are making based on such thinking and beliefs. In the case of mild depressive thinking, this may cut through the psychological difficulty sufficiently to surface the spiritual issues that need to be faced. In other cases, it may uncover the extent of the problem to the point where therapy can be logically suggested and more openly received.

To provide a sense of what we are referring to, the following several common distortions illustrate how people (and perfectionistic Christians in particular) fall prey to thinking errors that cause depressive feelings and an overall sense of discouragement:

- Unless I am perfect, I am not measuring up spiritually (black and white thinking).
- If everyone doesn't appreciate my homily or pastoral work then it means most of those responding well are just being nice and I am really not good at what I am doing (catastrophizing).
- I should be able to say yes to all the pastoral demands made of me (tyrannical “should” and “must” statements).
- If I make a mistake I should criticize myself (self-blame rather than self-understanding).

- If people I serve or work with think less of me, then I should think less of myself (negative self-evaluation).
- I can predict negative events (negative outlook that is the result of untested assumptions).

In looking at such distortions, more general questions can be asked about the situation that has given rise to such distortions. These include:

- What do I find most upsetting about the event I am describing?
- Have I tried to look at this event and my reactions from different angles?
- What does this issue ask me to let go of?
- If this difficulty can be avoided, why am I not avoiding it?
- If this problem is unavoidable, how can I face it directly?
- What am I being asked to learn about myself from this event?
- What is the “gift” amidst the pain or annoyance that I am missing and what approach will help me find it?

An illustration of this last point is the example of a student who considered himself a person of peace, a spiritual seeker, and someone who valued self-knowledge. During the first few classes though, he became more and more upset by the passionate statements and reactions of a student who sat a few rows behind him. The more she got emotionally aroused by the material being presented, the more upset he would become.

The teacher of this course on the integration of psychology and spirituality had developed a good relationship with the man, so he waited until he had seen these reactions a number of times. After the fourth class he asked the young man if he would remain after class. The man said he would and once the classroom was emptied, the professor mentioned the woman in question who was so outspoken. In response, the young man showed his upset at her. When this happened, the instructor quietly said, “She is your spiritual director.” He replied, “I’ll have to think about that.” To which the professor simply said, “I didn’t ask you to think about it. She is your spiritual director. Now see what she can teach you about what you are holding onto, the source of your own upset in yourself, and what God is calling you to understand about yourself and your ego in this reaction of yours.”

Reframing is most powerful when the issue is immediate, filled with emotion, and the call to look at it is made at the most opportune time. Once the student had time to process this request, he could reflect on the situation, learn from it and become freer than he was in the past. This was not because the environment changed but rather because the perception of it and himself changed.

At the very least, then, cognitive psychotherapeutic principles can aid those in spiritual direction, formation or pastoral guidance to think as clearly as possible and be alert for erroneous beliefs and distorted thinking patterns as well as new opportunities to learn and see even the negative as positive opportunities for growth and change. Moreover, these may be general in nature or tied to certain religious beliefs—a place where the pastoral minister can be of help.

Positive psychology principles, as was noted, do not gloss over a person’s defenses, sins or faults. However, they also do

not ignore someone's gifts and talents. As a matter of fact, when people present their shortcomings, the way these shortcomings are dealt with is by surfacing their gifts and the situations when these gifts become the very problems they are worried about. Let's look at an example of this.

A young man in formation comes in to see his novice master and expresses dismay that he is not getting along with his fellow novices. He says that he knows it is due to his blurting out his opinions on things and the fact that even though he feels his comments are correct in many instances, they don't like him expressing them so readily, and he can see their point. He is too outspoken and maybe this means he doesn't belong in the religious order and should leave.

From a cognitive standpoint, the novice director points out that the novice is jumping from one specific position—this style of behavior is not being accepted well—to a very broad one—I don't belong in this order. He then moves to a positive psychology orientation and says the following: "One of your wonderful gifts is that you are passionate about life and that is such a beautiful gift. Too many of us are too blasé about life or hold back. You don't." (And at this point cites examples of how his initiative and energy made a positive difference.)

He then goes on to say, "I think the question facing us is how to prune this gift from God so it doesn't become a problem for others and yourself." The novice responds, "How would we 'prune' this gift? It doesn't feel like a gift now." The novice master replies, "Yes, it doesn't feel like a gift because under certain situations it isn't. Pruning would involve looking at those situations where your gift is, well, in fact a true gift to others and when it isn't so we can see what you were thinking and feeling before you used your gift in an inappropriate way. By doing this, you can enjoy your gift and others can as well. You will also learn more about when and under what circumstances within you, your gift fails to be so. This is a great opportunity for spiritual and psychological growth. I am glad we are speaking about it. Now, let's look at what you were thinking and believing just prior to this last episode that you brought in today."

Persons seeking to find God and themselves through being both clear and gentle with themselves or those individuals they are called to guide will find a friend in both cognitive behavioral therapy and positive psychology. We have just touched the surface in introducing some of their concepts and approaches here. Rather than being solely instructive, we have primarily sought to create an interest in reading further in these two areas. Many in spirituality have utilized those psychologies that emphasize the role of the unconscious and early life experiences and this information is very important. What has been emphasized here, though, is that psychology has even more to offer those in ministry since those other approaches debuted. While a farmer certainly was happy to have a horse and plow rather than working on the fields by hand with a hoe, he also was happy when tractors became available. Just as theology and spirituality are dynamic, so is psychology. Both cognitive-behavioral therapy and positive psychology are—in the metaphor used—new tractors to be employed. We hope that our comments on them and their application to ministry will encourage you to read further, seek supervision in these areas, and take this "psychological tractor" to help plow the spiritual fields you are being asked to till in yourself and others.

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Regina Coll, C.S.J.

SHIFTING THE FOCUS

Is there anything more constant in life than change? Browsing through family photo albums may elicit nostalgia for times past, but they also record changes unnoticed while they were happening. Tiny daily changes pass unnoticed, that is until we embarrass a teenager by reminding them “How big you’ve gotten!” or “I remember you when you were only this high” or telling octogenarians “You look great!” with the unspoken reminder “for your age.”

But the most profound changes are not in outward appearances but are interior: changes in how we think or feel, what we value, how we decide important issues. Often, such interior changes involve a deepening of faith. Paul Crowley, S.J., explains “faith is not assent to dogma or adherence to religious duty, but [Christian] faith is the acceptance of the gift of God’s love in the person of Jesus. It is relationality ‘more intimate to me than I am to myself’ to quote St. Augustine.” Changes in that relationality involve a self-transcendence, a deepening of that “more intimate” relationality. It is more than intellectual agreement; it concerns imagination and emotions as well. Accepting this gift of God involves our whole being.

Such change, in Christian terms, is known as conversion.

THE MANY MEANINGS OF CONVERSION

Sometimes conversion involves choosing a different church or denomination, one more in line with what we have come to believe and feel and imagine. Traditionally, conversion implies an acceptance of the new religion's doctrines, thought patterns, moral teachings and forms of prayer. It is a major life change. But conversion is not a one-time event. As the doctrines of the new religion become incarnated in us, they influence our thoughts, our emotions and our behavior. We grow into and mature into the newly chosen denomination.

While accepting and being accepted by a different church may be the most common understanding of the word "conversion," it is not the only one. Often life experiences or events in society may raise questions not easily addressed by our faith. For some, that is a scary proposition. But for those willing to wrestle with questions concerning faith, new and deeper ways of experiencing that faith may occur. In fact, theologian Avery Dulles maintains questions are necessary to develop a mature faith:

To whip oneself up to an unfounded and merely subjective state of certitude is not faith but fanaticism. And to pretend to certitude I do not possess is hypocrisy. . . . Many people do not come to faith because they ask too few questions, not too many. When the mind is too full of its own certitude it has no room for God.

As people begin to question a particular issue theologians study and research Scripture and Tradition in order to find ways of addressing their concern. They may make traditional beliefs available to the rest of us in language we can more easily embrace. I am not talking about inventing new dogmas or denying treasured doctrines but rather making those more understandable to us by using language, analogues and metaphors of our time.

Often, such theological investigation involves calling attention to facets of a doctrine that may have been lost as

another facet was emphasized. For instance, in recent times the ancient dogma of the Body of Christ focused almost exclusively on Christ's presence in the bread and wine at Eucharist. Our strong and devout attention to the Eucharist as the Body of Christ overshadowed the teaching that the Christian community too is the Body of Christ. I know two Eucharistic Ministers who keep that in mind as they are distributing Communion. One says she prays that each communicant receives and becomes responsible for the community that is the Body of Christ. The other says she greets each person as Body of Christ. Neither is in any way denying that the bread and wine they share are indeed the Body and Blood of Christ. They are merely reminding themselves and others of the richness of the doctrine. They are in league with St. Augustine who in one of his sermons said, "When I hold up the host before communion, I say, 'Corpus Christi' and you reply, 'Amen', which means 'Yes we are.'"

In speaking of conversion here, I mean that deepening of faith people experience that Drew Christiansen, S.J., describes as the "experience of holiness in others and striving for holiness in their own lives, and through the prism of that holiness the overwhelming holiness of God." For Henri Nouwen, this process of striving for holiness, this deepening of our relationship with God, is known as spiritual formation. "Spiritual formation is not about steps or stages on the way to perfection. It is about the movements from the mind to the heart through prayer into many forms that unite us to God, each other and our truest selves." St. Therese of Lisieux, in her own poetic style, wrote, "I understand that if all the flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would no longer be decked out with wild flowers. And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden. . . . Perfection consists in doing [God's] will, in being what [God] wants us to be."

For historic as well as theological reasons, the effort to be what God wants us to be has had Christians primarily focused on sin and its consequences. The focus on avoiding sin sometimes led to a kind of rigid spirituality but it has also led many to great holiness and has

contributed to the transformation of sinful systems. But I believe it is time to shift the focus away from sin, and onto grace.

FROM SIN TO GRACE

Experts in the development of language tell us that we can know what is important to a people by the number of words they have for describing it. Consider, then, our vocabulary for sin. We speak of original sin, mortal and venial sin, capital sins, occasions of sin, sins of omission and sins of commission. Such attention to sin is so pervasive that recently three young men developed an app called "I Confess." In it sins are categorized in such a way that teenagers are presented with a different list than married people, for instance. Because the process involves admitting to particular sins, some people erroneously thought that it was indeed an electronic form of the sacrament of Reconciliation; so much so that the Vatican issued a statement clearing up the confusion.

But sin is not the whole story.

Shifting the spotlight, so to speak, is not a new idea. Dominican Father Albert Nolan describes such a shift between John the Baptist and Jesus. "John's mood is like the mournful tune of a funeral dirge; Jesus' mood is like the joyful tune of a wedding dance. John's behavior was characterized by fasting; Jesus' behavior was characterized by feasting. . . . Both John and Jesus represent the actions of Wisdom (that is to say of God), but they speak to different times and different circumstances." John and Jesus did not deny or condemn each other's teaching. In fact, each publicly spoke with reverence of the other, John admitting he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals and Jesus submitting to John's baptism.

So let us now consider how focusing more on grace affects not only our theological stance but also our relationship with all of creation and with God.

I am not suggesting that we deny the reality of sin. Reading the morning newspaper or listening to a television news report is enough to remind us of the reality of sin in the world. Violence, abuse and oppression that leave so many hungry, homeless and in dire poverty announce the corporate face of sin.

Examination of our own consciences keeps us aware of our individual sinful failures.

Before shifting the spotlight to grace, it may be well to reflect on our tradition to discover whether such a shift is warranted.

Genesis tells us that at each day of creation, God saw that it was good. When God created human beings, God set them in a web of relationality, making them partners with all other creatures and responsible for them. Stars, oceans, flowers, humans, wind, animals—all exist in an interrelated universe, dependent on one another. All exist to the praise and glory of God. The magnificence of it all has moved poets and musicians to write songs of praise.

The psalmist exclaims:

Make a joyful noise, all the earth;
Break forth in joyous song!

Sing praise to God with the
harp,

with the lyre and the sound of
music!

With trumpets and the sound
of the horn

Make a joyful noise to our God.

Let the sea roar and all that fills
it:

the world and those who dwell
in it!

Let the rivers clap their hands;
And the hills ring out their joy.
(Psalm 98)

A poet adds:

Glory be to God for dappled
things—

For skies of couple-color as a
brindled cow;

For rose moles all in stipple
upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut falls;
finches wings;

Landscape plotted and
pierced—fold, fallow, and
plough;

And all trades, their gear and
tackle and trim.

All things counter, original,
spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled
(who knows how?)

With swift, slow, sweet, sour,
adazzle, dim;

He fathers forth whose beauty
is past change;

Praise him.

(Gerard Manley Hopkins)

Having already blessed all of creation with signs and symbols of divine presence, God breathed into humans, sharing divine life. Theologians call this sharing sanctifying grace. Sanctifying because it makes possible relationship with God and thus makes us holy; grace because it is a gift, freely given and undeserved.

Gifts are not earned or negotiated. They are freely given and need no recompense. We can do nothing to deserve or to earn this participation in Divine Life. Nor can we speak of human nature apart from it. From the first instance of our existence, we share in God's very life. Hildegard of Bingen, a twelfth-century mystic, offers a delightful image of this relationship. She presents a pregnant woman, umbilical cord winding up through a trellis harboring vines, birds and butterflies to the Trinity, carrying grace from the Triune God, through nature to the child within her womb. God's life pours into us in our mother's womb; we are born in a state of grace, touched by sin but assured that "where sin abounds, grace abounds more" (Romans 5:20). Human nature is graced from the first instance of its creation, so much so that if we were able to see that graced nature, we would be blinded by the vision.

Trappist monk Thomas Merton tells of an experience that hinted at such vision. Standing at a busy corner in Louisville, Kentucky, he became overwhelmed by the realization that he loved all the people he was watching; that they were so beautiful, so bright and shiny; so alluring, he felt himself one with them. He reflects:

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes. Yet with all that God himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race. I have the immense joy of being human, a member of a race in which God himself became incarnate. . . . And if only every-one could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

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IN GOD'S OWN IMAGE

Merton's vision is echoed in the words of Latin American liberation theologians Ivone Gibara and Maria Clara Bingemar, "God's transcendence is manifest in God's creatures." It is also evident in the prayer suggested by Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B., "Oh God help me to believe the truth about myself—no matter how beautiful it is." That beauty, we know, is God's life within us and thus is a sure defense against pride. It is not a claim to our own magnificence.

Human nature has sometimes been thought of apart from, even in opposition to grace. Impossible! To be human, to be created in God's own image and likeness is to be graced. No wonder Wiederkehr's prayer reminds us how beautiful we are.

Our focusing on sin and its consequences has sometimes blinded us to the magnificence of the metaphor of human beings as made in the "image of God." God's gift of Self, our sharing in divine life is not destroyed by sin. I am reminded again that where sin abounds, grace abounds more. We are not always conscious of grace, that is, God's presence in our lives, but when we are most distracted and even in those times

when we submit to temptation we are still immersed in God's loving presence. God saturates creation.

It sometimes surprises me how difficult it is for people to accept this graced image of themselves and others. So taken are we with sinfulness that we hardly recognize grace when it enters our lives. Perhaps that is because there is an expectation of some kind of exotic mysterious revelation of divine presence. Rev. Angela Sims understood that God does not often act in flamboyant or exotic ways with us but is easily seen if we know how to look. She recognized grace when she interviewed elderly black women and men who were among the last generation of those who witnessed black people being lynched or who had a family story of a relative who had been lynched. She explained "I'm listening for how grace might play out and for notions of forgiveness." In its report of Rev. Sims' work, the *New York Times* said that what began as an investigation of a racial issue soon went beyond that to identify the grace of the moment. "The question of where God was in the midst of this evil" she said, "is held in tension with the way God acted. They [the people she interviewed] name the evil but they recognize something beyond it." The experience

left her pursuing a theology of resilience which, I believe, will lead to another example of God's presence in our lives.

Cardinal John Henry Newman famously said, "To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often." Perfection here does not suggest some abstract standard to which all are called but rather a process whereby we grow into the image of God, each of us becoming perfectly who we were created to be; each of us our own unique perfect self.

As we begin to recognize grace in our lives and society, it will not only lead to gratitude for God's many splended gifts; it will also lead to the peace for which we so earnestly pray. As we reverence all others as images of God and all of creation as God's masterpiece, we may finally bring about the Kingdom of God, which is none other than grace in its fullness.

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Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Ritual: Mediating Change

Change, it would seem, is the constant in our lives, whether we consider physical growth or psychosocial development in terms of an individual, a family, or a political entity. The alleged Chinese proverb or, perhaps, as some would say, Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times," tells us something of our personal and societal apprehensions and ambivalent feelings regarding change.

Even a brief survey of the economic situation in our country is sufficient to remind us that we certainly are living in

Whatever changes might be ahead of us, it is certain that we will be offered opportunities for positive growth as well as challenges to the status quo that threaten our equilibrium as individuals, as members of a family, or as a society.

"interesting times." The rapid rate of change in the business environment has demanded that organizations consider new options and new ways of working if they are to remain viable. These changes, felt at the philosophical and cultural levels, are reflected at the level of policy-making and strategic planning. As a result, the idea of lifetime employment with a single employer has been lost. The role of unions and collective bargaining agreements are challenged as employers "right size" their operations, paring down to a critical core while outsourcing other functions. For a company to retain its competitive edge, continuous investment in technology is required but leads to rapid turnover of employees, as those with old skills become obsolete and those with new skills are needed.

In addition, we are warned of numerous effects, many of which are undesirable, that are likely to accompany

climate change. Entire ecosystems may be substantially altered or entirely lost, while the shrinking of the polar ice caps and rising ocean waters might submerge coastal cities and low-lying islands. Storms are predicted to become more violent and once fertile lands are expected to experience desertification. Interesting times indeed!

Whatever changes might be ahead of us, it is certain that we will be offered opportunities for positive growth as well as challenges to the status quo that threaten our equilibrium as individuals, as members of a family, or as a society. Whether changes are viewed as normal, positive, and even eagerly anticipated events, or as things that are unwanted, negative, and out of the ordinary sequence of life, change inevitably leads to disturbances on the physical, social and psychological planes of our existence. Every change, no matter how welcome, requires that we leave



something behind. There is always some piece of our individual, familial or societal past from which we must separate if growth and development are to occur.

SEPARATION FROM THE PAST: PAINFUL BUT NECESSARY

Separating from a piece of ourselves is a painful process. When we are obliged to do so, we appear to find ourselves in a peculiar state, no longer securely anchored in our past roles and identities, but not yet fully inhabiting our new roles and future self. It is as if we stand poised at the threshold, hesitating before we take the step that will commit us to a new form of being in relation to ourselves, to other members of our family, to our work cohort, or to society at large. I can recall my own discomfort when I decided not to renew my medical technologist license. I realized I was leaving an important piece of my self-definition behind, not to mention something necessary for my livelihood, and had not as yet completed my studies in the field of psychology or obtained the license required for clinical practice. In the midst of my anxiety, I realized I was in a process of transition, making a commitment to a future work role and identity that was not guaranteed.

Transitioning from one phase of life to another, facilitating our acceptance, assimilation, and adaptation to change, enhancing our ability to flourish, to enlarge our lives by embracing change and to be transformed—all these responses to the challenge of change require work on our part and on the part of those with whom we interact in the process of becoming. There are a number of ways to cope with change, some of which are of dubious value. For example, reliance on the defense mechanism of denial attempts to negate awareness of the changes that are occurring and maintain the fiction that things are as they have “always” been. The use of intellectualization, while allowing for cognitive recognition of change, functions to suppress or minimize the impact of the emotional factors that must be acknowledged and assimilated if we are to move forward into a new reality.

Other coping mechanisms are far more helpful and growth enhancing.

One of these is the use of appropriate rituals that foster harmony between our subjective experiences and the social structures in which we live. Such rituals serve to usher in a period of separation from the past while assisting us in making the necessary transition to a new reality and encouraging receptivity on the part of others to acknowledge and respond to our new status. The role of the receptive other—be it our parents, co-workers, or some other form of communal or societal structure, is vital to our making a successful transition. How can we truly become adults, if our parents continue to treat us as children? How do we become supervisors if no one acknowledges our new role and authority within a work setting? How is a new country born if no other political entity recognizes it?

RITUAL FACILITATES TRANSITION

Those of us who are members of a church that has a highly ritualized sacramental system may find ourselves at home when thinking of ritual as a potent facilitator of change. Lambert J. Leijssen, a theologian who has specialized in the study of the sacraments, offers a postmodern view of sacramental liturgical inculturation that integrates insights from a developmental perspective in terms of the individual's participation and emphasizes the role of the community, the receptive other, that affirms and is itself built up by the individual's participation in the sacraments.

Starting with baptism, the sacrament of the beginning, the infant becomes a “child of God,” a member of the community that constitutes the Body of Christ. For the person baptized as an adult, the image is often that of dying with Christ to the old person and being reborn to new life. The outpouring of the Spirit at the time of confirmation marks a transition during adolescence or early adulthood that strengthens and consolidates the individual's fellowship in the Church. The Eucharist, the high point of Christian initiation and acknowledgment of our identity as the people of God, is celebrated in the various circumstances of our lives. Over the years, we bring our daily life along to every eucharistic

celebration in order to unite it with Jesus' self-giving as we, members of the Body of Christ, are transformed by the power of the life-giving Spirit.

As we mature, the sacraments of vocation come to the foreground. The sacrament of matrimony ushers us from single life into the life of a married couple whose mutual promise of loving fidelity is anchored in God's covenant love. Through the sacrament of holy orders the newly ordained receives a renewed gift of the Spirit and becomes a new person, called to serve in the name of Christ and to fulfill the mission of building up the church.

The sacraments of healing, namely penance and the sacrament of the sick, also serve to facilitate periods of transition. At times we stand literally on the threshold of conversion, moving from personal and communal sin to transformation in Christ through the power of the Spirit. At other times, our transition is that which takes us from earthly life through illness and death to eternal life. The final anointing and outpouring of the Spirit proclaims the elderly or ill person as a sign of surrender, an icon of the suffering Jesus, a person with a mission within the Church who continues to contribute to the welfare of the people of God.

NEED FOR ADDITIONAL RITUALS

Although these sacramental rituals come at strategic points in our lives, there is a need for other rituals as we cope with the many changes we encounter throughout the course of our lifetimes. Sources of helpful ritual may be found within the family circle and the society at large. Given the variety of ethnic and cultural influences that we have here in the United States, we are able to find any number and type of rituals with the potential to mark and assist us in the various transitions we make in daily life and through the key life stages. These rituals may be relatively small but they are nevertheless powerful as they are capable of setting us in motion on many levels simultaneously: psychological, biological and emotional.

If we think of the ritual of the family dinner, how many of us recall moving from the “children's table” to a place at the “grownups' table” when the

extended family gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas? Or perhaps you might recall being invited to have coffee after dinner with the adult members of the family rather than being excused with the younger children? Our elevation in status and recognition within the family usually generated a corresponding change in self-perception and behavior.

Birthday celebrations, particularly the *quinceañera* or sweet sixteen celebration that signifies a young girl's emergence into sexual adulthood, are powerful rituals within the family and larger society. Although we no longer tend to approach marriage at such early ages, these celebrations do serve notice that the young woman is now entering a new life stage. An interesting touch in the *quinceañera* celebration is the presentation of the "last doll"—a symbol of the childhood self that the girl is leaving behind as she now devotes herself to the life tasks of a young woman.

Still other rituals serve to facilitate our passage through moments of loss. Those impromptu memorials, often consisting of flowers, toys and religious icons set up along the streets of our cities to commemorate the untimely, often violent death of a youngster, or the simple crosses and wreaths one sees along the highway at the scenes of accidents that involved a fatality, witness to the power of a ritual to facilitate working through the stages of grief and accepting the reality of loss.

Overall, it appears our society prefers not to invest in formal ritual due, perhaps, to a tendency on our parts to view ritual with suspicion, perceiving it as coercive or oppressive on the one hand and empty or meaningless on the other. We tend to adopt a casual approach to many aspects of life and look to other means to cope with changes, large and small. The rise in the use of e-vites to weddings and the e-book for inscribing condolences speak to changes that accompany two of our most important periods of ritual activity, marriage and funerals.

Nevertheless, there are times when the transition to a new phase of life cannot be accomplished with ease. Undoubtedly, most of us have recognized periods of resistance to change, moments in which we feel "stuck," able neither to move forward

nor to maintain our place in the current situation. As psychologist Onno van der Hart notes in his book *Rituals in Psychotherapy*, at such moments, therapy—whether we engage in it as individuals or as a family unit—may become the ritual through which we make the transition to the phase of life that is dictated by the changes occurring within or around us.

THERAPEUTIC RITUAL

One of the positive features of ritual is its potential to change individuals, families, or other groups while at the same time allowing the participants to feel secure and stable, able to maintain a grip on their situation. The very order of a therapeutic ritual emphasizes structure, predictability and integration, thereby reducing anxiety. From the outset of the psychoanalytic movement, analysts recognized the value of setting a consistent time to meet for therapy sessions that, often enough, occurred three to five times each week. Therapists, not only psychoanalysts, view the regularly scheduled appointment as a means of supporting the need for order and security in the midst of an anxiety-provoking situation.

Some rituals in common use among therapists are devised to assist in separating from a departed family member, perhaps by writing a final letter to the person, detailing all that was left unspoken at the time of the death, and, burning or burying the letter once the client feels all has finally been said. A ritual of this sort is especially useful in allowing a person to express all the feelings that were repressed or suppressed during the course of a final illness or generated by the suddenness of the loss. Many people fear being overwhelmed by their feelings of anger or anguish and, rather than risk loss of emotional control, they avoid the tasks of mourning. The demands of the ritual, for example, that one devote only a specific amount of time to the letter each day, that the writing be done only in a specified place and at a specified time, that the letter be handwritten and the like, serve to allow for expression of repressed feelings while channeling them in such a way that they remain manageable rather than anxiety-provoking.

Through the use of a ritual of this sort, there is also assimilation and acceptance of the loss occurring on an unconscious level—many times a client will report actually thinking of the deceased person less at other times during the day because there is now a set time for thinking of him or her. The concluding act of the ritual in which the letter is either buried or burned and its ashes scattered, serves to concretize the separation of the client from the departed person. It opens the door to new experiences, thus re-introducing the person to the land of the living and fostering a perception of the future in which the departed person, although of major significance in the person's past, will not play a major role.

Therapists also make use of such techniques as reframing or re-labeling symptom behavior and sometimes prescribe that the individual client or the family practice the symptom while viewing it from a different perspective. With an adolescent suffering from anorexia, one might prescribe "fasting" as a prelude to reaching maturity rather than focusing on the rebellious refusal of food. A ritual of this sort attempts to bring about change in one's self-perception while also transforming the family structure from one of coercion with reference to food-related issues to one of acceptance of the person's right to self-determination.

SEEKING TRANSFORMATION

There is also renewed interest at this time in assisting clients to make profound changes that lead to personal transformation. Carl Jung, for example, made use of the symbolic discipline of alchemy as a way of exploring the depths of the human psyche, awakening himself and his followers to a new level of mindfulness. Rather than seeking to turn base metal into gold, he perceived alchemy as a spiritual art that has as its aim the psychological transformation of the person participating in the analytic process.

Joseph Campbell's work, *Hero with One Thousand Faces*, published in 1949, introduced the concept of the Hero's Journey into popular thinking. Detailing a movement from unconscious innocence to ultimate self-awareness, his seminal work has inspired a number of other writers to explore the work of personal transformation. One author, Carol S. Pearson, wrote *Awakening the*

Heroes Within (1991) in which she identified twelve archetypes or inner guides that would serve to help us find and develop the deepest levels of ourselves and transform our world. She was of the opinion that the heroic quest or Hero's Journey was required of us all and presented archetypes that served to prepare us for our journey, guided us during the journey itself and freed us to become whole, capable of contributing to the transformation of our culture. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., a Jungian analyst, also made use of archetypal imagery to encourage the growth of women. Her initial work, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (1984, 2004) and her later book, *Goddesses in Older Women* (2001), suggest paths of growth that encourage women to see themselves in new perspectives and transform societal thinking about aging, particularly as applied to women.

Therapist-trainers such as Melissa Bradley, M.S.W., have also recognized and tapped the potential of the Heroic Journey as a means of assisting clients to work through the changes brought about by the experience of trauma, abuse, grief and loss, life and career transitions, and addictions issues. Trained in music education as well as in psychology and having spent years teaching in the arts field as well as dedicating much of her career as a social worker to those who suffered trauma and abuse, Ms. Bradley's work integrates insights drawn from literature and movies as well as spiritual and religious teachings to help others navigate the Heroic Journey to personal transformation and to emerge stronger and more resilient than before.

A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO CHANGE

Those of us raised in Western society often find ourselves resisting change, seeing it many times as the enemy rather than embracing it as the way life is. We tend to speak of managing change and coping with change. Sometimes we speak of ourselves as living in a state of transition, as our life circumstances demand change such as relocating our home or taking a new job. We also sometimes refer to a challenging person in our lives as someone who is "putting us through changes."

The Buddhist tradition, however, offers us another perspective from

which to consider change. Zen practitioner and author, Perle Besserman, suggests that we not focus so much on living *with* change but on living *as* change, owning the moment we are in right now. Rather than *expending* our energy on *coping* with the ebb and flow of our lives, she invites us to *become* that ebb and flow. Suffering, she teaches, arises from our failures to accept changing circumstances. In contrast, owning and accepting change, even those changes that might be difficult, can release us from needless suffering. What is called for is freeing ourselves from attachments to things that will inevitably let us down due to their impermanence.

Zen therapist David Brazier noted in this universe nothing is ever lost but everything changes. In his view, loss is really a process of transformation and evolution. A healthy encounter with loss has the potential to make us more accepting of the world and less intolerant of others. On the other hand, a negative encounter with loss may make us more rigid, more determined than ever to grasp whatever "constancies" appear to remain available to us. This grasping to maintain some constancy may take a variety of forms. We might find ourselves clinging fiercely and possessively to a person or career in an effort to deny other losses or we might find ourselves grasping at a particular dogma or vision of God in an effort to maintain our spiritual grounding in the midst of competing insights and practices.

CALL TO CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Contemplative prayer or meditation offers us one of the best ways to live with or to live *as* change. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh speaks of developing mindfulness, the level of awareness that opens us to make each of our actions, no matter how humble or ordinary, a rite or ceremony. He reminds us that meditation is not a form of evasion but rather an encounter with reality that is not a static entity but one that is fluid and changing.

Many of the breathing exercises associated with the practice of mindfulness have been embraced by practitioners in the field of psychology who recognized their ability to reduce the anxiety and fearfulness that frequently accompany change and open the imagination to

new possibilities, thus allowing a person or group to invite and welcome change at a given moment in their lives.

Thomas Keating and others have kindled interest in the Christian contemplative tradition as they re-introduced such practices as *lectio divina* and centering prayer that show us the way to reach "the still point of the turning world." For as T.S. Eliot told us in his poem *Burnt Norton* "there the dance is." By developing a contemplative mode of prayer we awaken to and come to rest in the abiding presence of God who, unchanging, remains the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) yet nonetheless, makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

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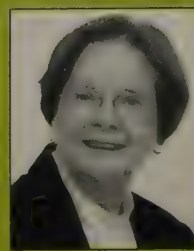
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ACCEPTING THE INVITATION

Lessons from the Gospel of Matthew



N TO CHANGE:

**Rev. Joseph A. Stewart-Sicking, Ed.D.
Alexander J. Shaia, Ph.D.**

Change seems to be the only stable feature of American religion in the early twenty-first century. In one prominent study (Putnam, 2010), over 60% of those raised as Jews, Roman Catholics, or Mainline Protestants had switched or lapsed from these traditions. One in ten religious adherents were “liminal,” sitting on the threshold of affiliation by being in one year and out the next. Another 16% considered themselves “nones,” with no religious affiliation, the fastest growing group. Yet, few of the “nones” were nonbelievers; many drew on multiple religious traditions for wisdom.

It might appear that with all this religious change and wandering, contemporary Americans are experts at spiritual adaptation. But is this really the case? Flexibility is an important virtue for the spiritual life, but there is an important distinction to be made between constant changing and the process of change begun by accepting an invitation to a new step on a spiritual journey.

The difference between chaotic and purposeful spiritual change can be likened to the difference between the nomad and the pilgrim. Nomads are characterized by the degree to which they are disconnected from other communities. Nomads don't know where they will end up, and they don't worry about that. For this reason, many postmodern thinkers have found the

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nomad to be an attractive model for living in a world where commitments to big ideas and stable knowledge are no longer tenable. Indeed, in a world of nonstop change, it is important to be content with the present moment without being inordinately attached to one's plans. But nomads are also susceptible to becoming adrift, unreflective, unstable, not knowing who they are.

The pilgrim is like the nomad: transient, in the middle of a journey, continually in motion. But pilgrims are shaped by more than just travel. Pilgrims have a destination, a history, a calling. No matter how many strange lands and treacherous roads they travel, pilgrims are on their way to that place, only partly known, that gives them hope. Pilgrims are what nomads become when they find their calling: Abraham, the Israelites, Paul. There is still danger. There is still transience. But there is also something more, for their hope makes pilgrims part of a community. They are part of a bigger story and what they do each moment matters. Like nomads, pilgrims are equipped to deal with change, but for pilgrims, this change is meaningful. Unfortunately, the trajectory of contemporary society seems to be towards spiritual nomadism. Why is this the case?

LIQUID MODERNITY

For a generation, sociologists have routinely pointed out that the condition of Western, capitalist societies is changing. Zygmunt Bauman (2007) succinctly sums up this change as liquid modernity, "a condition in which social forms... can no longer (and are not expected to) keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them... and cannot serve as frames of reference for human action and long-term life strategies" (p. 1). In liquid modernity, power shifts from states to global corporations. Social cohesion and the sense of belonging to a community wane. Without any solid social forms, life becomes a series of short-term projects with individual choice at the center. As a result, ties to the past or to social groups become a liability.

This state of affairs makes spiritual development especially difficult. With the elevation of personal choice, the logic of the market can dominate all arenas of one's life. In this milieu, spirituality and religion can devolve into consuming a kind of special effect (Ward, 2004)—a fully immersive experience simulating what religion used to be, a theme park of empty calories for the soul. The effects of liquid modernity are especially acute upon spiritual formation. Growing in the life of faith is not a short-term project, nor is it done in isolation. Spiritual disciplines require practice and role models. They are done for their own sake, not for productivity. And when we inevitably encounter those dark nights of the soul, we need a community of support to hold us up and show us that people do make it to the other side of suffering. Liquid modernity can encourage dabbling over perseverance; when we struggle, we can abandon our spiritual practice as just another short-term project and move on. Spirituality can be just another hobby. But in its very etymology (*religare*, to link), religion is all about links across time with an extended community. How can mature religion and spirituality flourish in liquid modernity? How can change not make us spiritual nomads?

LESSONS FROM MATTHEW: THEN AND NOW

Nothing is stable. But we have been here before. Indeed, today we could be living in Great Antioch on the Orontes, the location of Matthew's Jewish Messianic community in the 70s of the first century. Antioch was built on a high plain, over an active fault line. The result was a continual cycle of destruction and rebuilding. Added to the outer shaking, Matthew's community was in the midst of a shattering spiritual quake. In 70 C.E., the Roman Emperor Vespasian ordered his soldiers to destroy the Jewish Temple, massacre the priestly bloodline and strip Jerusalem of its wealth and esteem. Judaism as a religion was decapitated. The Temple that ensured God's covenant was demolished. Those holding religious authority were dead. The holy city was



despoiled and deserted. The Jewish people were bereft.

In the midst of such horror, four types of psychological response could be expected. In the context of first century Jewish expression, the four might be named nihilist, moralistic, distraction, invitation. Sole or in combination, these four responses shape the spiritual questions, needs and answers provided by Matthew's text.

The nihilist response sees everything collapsing—the covenant, God's mercy, even God's existence—leading to belief that soon the earth would be destroyed. The only thing left is to prepare for the end. All are doomed. The moralist response tries to understand the destruction as punishment for sin. What is required is repentance and reform. When accomplished, God would lead the faithful in rebuilding what was lost: the holy city, the priesthood and the Temple. Distraction employs a variety of methods to cover the pain and allow a veneer of normality and control. One might displace pain with exhaustive work, addiction, or other ways that distract from feeling and seeing such shattering realities and their consequences. The fourth style is invitation. Here, grief and loss are seen, held and felt, allowing them to form a

threshold for growth that ultimately may lead to more vital living. This is the perspective of Matthew's Gospel. Presenting the story and teaching of the Christ to a traumatized community, Matthew reveals practices for facing change, both for the community in Great Antioch dealing with the destruction of the Temple and for spiritual pilgrims looking for anchors in a liquid modernity.

What practices does the Gospel of Matthew offer for facing change? Some of the most powerful practices for accepting the invitation to change are seen in how Matthew tells the story of the community surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

JOSEPH—ACCEPT PILGRIMAGE (MATTHEW 1:18-25)

Joseph, in the lineage of David, is betrothed to a woman who we may well imagine is of equal lineage. In fact, her cousins are members of the priestly tribe, and she may have been as well. But by great and unwelcome surprise, Joseph suddenly faces a defining dilemma: his betrothed is with child. Any compassion he may feel for her would be far outweighed by a higher responsibility to protect both his family

lineage and his father from shame. Matthew tells us that Joseph found a way to protect his family by deciding to "quietly dismiss Mary." What happens next will put everything Joseph has been taught to revere at great risk. An angel comes in a dream, saying, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife for she is with child from the Holy Spirit." Imagine the internal dilemma Joseph faces. Now, he shares with Mary new life within—an unsettling invitation from God and one that directly opposes what is expected by family, tribe and religious obligation. If he agrees to complete the marriage, the verdict will be swift and final. He will take on Mary's shame and shunning—banished to wander far away from the support of family and the home he has known. Worse still, before his fellow Jews, he would be recognized as one marked by sin.

Appearing in the first chapter of Matthew's text, the story carries an unmistakable lesson. Accepting God's invitation requires choice and with it the significant losses of a traditional home and support from those closest. In fact, it may require us to accept this invitation before we can even feel or understand it fully. Joseph was not pregnant. He could not feel the new life within, and he still had the option of leaving. The Messianic Christians of

Antioch knew this dilemma, choice and grief. They also were coming to know the new life and vitality being born among them. Many today face this invitation and dilemma, and it is not always as clear as an angel appearing. Something in our life has shown up pregnant. Will we accept the invitation to journey? And if so, will we journey as a nomad or a pilgrim—going anywhere or somewhere?

GO TO EGYPT—MOVE WITH PAIN (MATTHEW 2:13-15)

Following the visit of the Magi, Matthew recounts an angel again visiting Joseph with an odd instruction. “Take the mother and child and go to Egypt.” An angel is telling a new Jewish father, having just witnessed the appearance of Magi, to take his family and flee to the very place that represents slavery and oppression. Go there for safety? Really? Certainly, this is the last place someone might look for a Jew in hiding, but the story has far more to say about facing change.

As we set out on an inner or outer spiritual journey, there is temptation to focus only on a yet-to-be-discovered paradise. However, wisdom teaches that such efforts can easily become fueled by flight, an instinctual response to “get away” from a perceived source of pain. The impetus to flee inevitably blurs our vision, so whatever we meet along the journey may be dismissed too readily if it appears too similar to what we have left. An old aphorism captures this moment: we tend to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

For the Jewish Christians of Antioch, this was a pressing lesson. This text was cautioning them not to reject Judaism or their closest family members who were shaming and shunning them. They were asked to accept the pain and not greet perceived betrayals with rejection—to journey with the pain rather than distance themselves from it. Intimately wrestling with the pain—so that we might no longer fear it—is a critical step in transforming our journey from nomad to pilgrim. Paralyzed by the fear of pain and avoiding anything that might bring it up, we are not free to live or discern a future. Instead, we are rather imperceptibly doomed to wander in distraction rather than walk in hope.

YOU HAVE HEARD IT SAID— WELCOME CONFUSION (MATTHEW 5:21-48)

Matthew’s setting of the Sermon on the Mount holds a section where Jesus repeatedly says in various words, “you have heard it said . . . but now I say” These sayings are like Zen koans, intended to confuse usual understanding or conventional wisdom. Unlearning is more difficult than acquiring knowledge about a system that one does not know. And the Messianic Jews in Antioch needed to unlearn a rigid philosophy of life common in the last years of the Temple and priesthood.

As pilgrims, we too need to practice “beginner’s mind.” If we grew up in Christianity or have been a member for more than a few years—we have a disability. We have unexamined assumptions about our tradition. To let go of the known and allow ourselves for a time to “not know” is usually accompanied with anxiety and a profound dis-ease. Yet perceiving confusion as necessary and vital is a key to larger life. Without a period of “not knowing”, there is no real learning, only recycling.

SIGNS OF THE END OF THE AGE—KEEP AWAKE THROUGH DUSK (MATTHEW 24:36-44)

After his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus speaks to his disciples on the Mount of Olives. His conflict with the scribes and Pharisees is reaching its climax, and his mission is inexorably leading him towards execution. He speaks of the razing of the Temple and signs of the End, the trauma fresh in the minds of the Jewish Christians of Antioch. Both in that age and our own, when the very foundations of the Temple in our lives are shaken, the Christ advises us to “keep awake.”

The timing of this counsel is important. For many Christians, this passage is read on the First Sunday of Advent (Year A). In the Northern Hemisphere, this means that the text is accompanied by the shortening of day and lengthening of night. This juxtaposition highlights the lesson of the text. Wakefulness is key, for an invitation is coming—exactly when the light is diminishing, just as many are falling asleep. Jewish tradition holds that sunset

and our entrance into night is the transition between the old and new days; a new day begins at sunset. Many of us would rather face change in the comfort and clarity of dawn, but sometimes, we have to take a first step when darkness falls and the outcome is less than sure. Pilgrims are called to pay attention to the way even when it seems frightening or exhausting.

UNNAMED MOUNTAIN—ANTICIPATE SURPRISE (MATTHEW 28:16-20)

Matthew’s text concludes with an account of the Risen One, on an unnamed mountain in Galilee, sending forth the disciples to everywhere. Everywhere? How do you enter that into a GPS? As one anonymous saying has it, “if you have already been there, your travels will only end where you started.” The Jewish Christians of Antioch surely wished for a clear roadmap to the future. Who were they to fashion a new religion? How were they to create? What were they to create? In the face of all this, they are given this text. Go everywhere—no GPS, no strategic plan, no budget. But here is Christ’s gift, “Know I am with you.” Having accepted the life of pilgrim, agreed to walk with pain rather than flee it, practicing daily the welcome of confusion, we are freed to go any- and everywhere and be surprised! Is this not the greatest excitement for a pilgrim? To turn a corner—one not noted in the tour book or advised by a guide—and find a place or a person that welcomes you to a home you have always known and feared you would never find. In that moment of surprise, you know you were led, you know you were accompanied, you know greater trust. You know resurrected life!

THE FOUR-FOLD JOURNEY

Matthew’s Gospel shows how important it is in the spiritual life to accept change as an invitation. While spiritual leaders often think about how people grow and develop along the spiritual journey, we can forget that it is a large piece of the spiritual life just to set off on that pilgrimage. Classical Christian ascetical theology typically describes the contours of the spiritual life by the triple way of purgation,

illumination and union. However, the purgative way of reorienting one's life cannot begin until one has accepted the invitation to change itself. In past periods in which belonging to some religious group was a given, purgation might rightly have been an appropriate focus for spiritual direction. But in liquid modernity, it is easy to postpone indefinitely any serious engagement with a spiritual tradition. In these times, the art of accepting the invitation to change and sticking with that decision amidst so many other options become central challenges of the spiritual life. Therefore, it is helpful to consider the fundamental shape of the spiritual life in a fourfold manner, explicitly including those times in which we have to say yes to the invitation to change. According to this model, spiritual development can be seen as the continual cycling through four fundamental questions (Shaia, 2010): How do we face change?; How do we move through suffering?; How do we receive joy?; and How do we mature in service?

PRACTICING CHANGE

As Matthew's Gospel makes clear, accepting the invitation to change is not an isolated event. It is a daily practice, one that takes time and discipline to master. For much of Christian history, such attention to spiritual practice has been seen as the domain of monastics, and the great monastic traditions offer much wisdom on how to practice change well. However, the monastic ideal provides concrete challenges for the pilgrim of liquid modernity. Not only do monastics dedicate all day every day to prayer, rest, and work, but the monastic ideal presumes a life of stability. In fact, stability—to stick with one's community and bloom where one is planted—is an essential vow in the Rule of Benedict. In liquid modernity, how is that possible for those who cannot commit to monastic life?

WHERE HAVE WE SEEN GOD?

Perhaps we can learn from Ignatius Loyola, who adapted traditional monastic ideals for his companions who were always on the move. With constant change, we must build up our ability to find God in all things. Ignatius's primary tool for building this awareness is the

familiar daily Examen, consisting of five steps: First, recall that you are in the presence of a loving God wherever you are. Then remember in gratitude the gifts you were given this day. Ask the Spirit's help in being honest and patient with yourself. Then remember the day, hour by hour, and how you responded to choices that presented themselves—did your responses reflect the Spirit of faith, hope and love, or did they flow from a spirit of anger, pride or fear? Finally, pray to Jesus in a spirit of thanksgiving, praise, and amendment of life. In accordance with the *Spiritual Exercises* Principle and Foundation, Examen assumes that the world, even this hectic one, is made to help us love God. In liquid modernity, it allows us to become pilgrims that pay attention to God's presence along the way, even if the way is constantly changing.

Not only may the Examen be done in any circumstance in our fluid world, but it is also an exercise that we can help our fellow pilgrims to practice. We can get in the habit of asking our spiritual friends, "Where have you seen God?" "What is God calling you to do now?" and help them discern the spirit motivating their choices. In congregations, this practice can be done through ministry groups or parish councils, and it can be done thinking of our individual choices or discerning about those of our group. As we share stories of where we have encountered God, we join the ancient Christian practices of discernment and testimony in a virtuous circle—one that counteracts our tendencies to go through our spiritual lives alone without paying attention.

CHANGING WELL

It has been said that the spiritual challenges of late modernity call for a spiritual revolution, a new St. Benedict bringing a rule of life for how to live in a world of constant change, commodified happiness and vanishing traditions. As the Gospel of Matthew (and St. Benedict) have shown, Christians have been through world-shattering change before. To bring a new spiritual era to birth, we must above all learn to accept change as an invitation. We must be willing to move past the pain of the world constantly dissolving before our eyes. We must welcome confusion. We must be attentive even as the light is failing.

And we must trust that wherever we are sent, we will find God there. If we cultivate the practices of pilgrimage, we will find that liquid modernity is not a storm-tossed sea, but that winding river of life that flows to a new Jerusalem.

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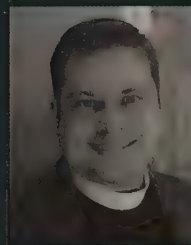
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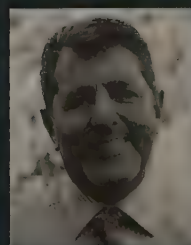
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LEADING CHANGE

Celeste DeSchryver Mueller, D.Min.

Human institutions and organizations crave stability and permanence. The very word “institution” connotes immutability. When change threatens the stability of organizations, they often seek refuge in “what we have always done.” The paradox in that inclination is that change is the most stable and enduring feature of human communities. “What we have always done” is *change*. As early as 500 BCE, Heraclitus observed the constancy of change: “You cannot step twice into the same river,” and further, suggested that “it is in change that things find repose.” Leading change means navigating the ever-present tension between the human need for stability and the inevitability of change.

HAS CHANGE CHANGED?

Recently, commentators in diverse fields have observed the impact of an accelerating pace of change in contemporary society, which Peter Vaill captures in the phrase “permanent whitewater.” He describes the situation as a “continual occurrence of . . . surprising, novel, ill-structured, and obtrusive events [which] makes permanent whitewater a descriptor of the overall system over which a managerial leader is in charge. . . . As that famous philosopher of the human condition, Roseanne Roseannadanna, used to say on *Saturday Night Live*, ‘It just goes to show ya, it’s always something’” (Vaill, 2010). The image of “whitewater” evokes both the increased pressure on leaders and the high degree of attentiveness needed to navigate change effectively.

Where should leaders focus their heightened attention? Business literature primarily suggests techniques and strategies intended to produce particular behaviors among employees, which, in turn, are intended to achieve desired organizational goals. John Kotter, for example, offers a frequently quoted eight step process for successful change: “1. Increase sense of urgency; 2. Build the guiding team; 3. Get the vision right; 4. Communicate for buy in; 5. Empower action; 6. Create short-term wins; 7. Don’t let up; 8. Make change stick” (Kotter and Cohen, 2002, p. 7). Studies suggest, however, that techniques and strategies are not sufficient to effectively lead change.

In recent surveys, CEOs report that up to 75% of their organizational change efforts do not yield the promised results. . . . Instead of enjoying the fruits of a redesigned production unit, the leader must manage the hostility and broken relationships created by the redesign. Instead of glorying in the new efficiencies produced by restructuring, the leader must face a burned out and demoralized group of survivors. Instead of basking in [success] after a merger, leaders must scramble frantically to get people to work together peaceably, let alone effectively (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers, 1998).





If leaders attempt to cope with the complexity of change by reducing it to an equation that ignores the human complexity of change, their efforts will continue to leave a wake of undesired and chaotic outcomes.

If leaders attempt to cope with the complexity of change by reducing it to an equation that ignores the *human* complexity of change, their efforts will continue to leave a wake of undesired and chaotic outcomes. Change raises deeply human questions about identity and relationships, belonging, meaning, purpose and worth. When strategies and techniques for change management are employed by leaders who are committed to responding personally to the human impact of change, the organization will find the necessary stability to embrace and navigate change effectively.

THE STORIES

To focus our reflections on change, we will follow two actual changes faced by small-sized organizations through three phases of the change process.

1. The senior leaders of a small distributing company get a grim financial forecast and decide it is time for a reorganization that includes eliminating four positions in the company.
2. Administrators at a small school ask Jim, a faculty member, to develop and promote innovative e-learning programs that will provide much needed revenue, but which dramatically change the established curriculum.

Imagine the process of change as a kayaking adventure. The organization with all its people leaves the familiar harbor headed toward a distant shore and will travel uncharted and turbulent waters. Essential human questions and needs emerge in each phase of the journey, which highlight ways that leaders can help to navigate change while allowing the organization to maintain needed stability.

LEAVING THE SHORE

All change involves loss. "Transition starts with an ending . . . and people don't like endings" (Bridges, 2009, p. 23). This simple human truth is often missed or ignored both by those undergoing change and by those leading change. The experience of loss accounts for the puzzling emotions which surface when leaders ask their people to let go of what has been.

- The employees who kept their jobs through the reorganization of the distributing company are quiet and withdrawn. The normally raucous lunch table is almost deserted. Even the barbecue that senior leaders prepared and served fails to lift spirits. One of the managers comes in and says, "C'mon guys, it's not like anybody died."

It feels like someone has died, however. In fact, close observation reveals that those affected by organizational change will experience many or all of the stages of grief identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance (1969). If those who are being asked to let go of familiar surroundings, jobs, co-workers, friends or processes are unaware of the feelings associated with grief that they may be experiencing, or if their feelings are unwelcome and remain unexpressed, the behavioral result is likely to be withdrawal, resistance, passive aggression or even sabotage of the new plan.

- At the school, the faculty are losing familiar ways of functioning that have provided a structure of meaning and identity. The grieving is less immediate, but negotiations that take place in formal and informal meetings echo the stages of grief. Comments like “I use technology in my teaching; chalk is technology” humorously indicate denial, which could quickly become resistance. Some faculty members, silent in the faculty meeting, angrily pick apart the details of the plan in the “meeting after the meeting.” Others are relentless in arguing to retain as many aspects of the familiar classroom setting as they can. Some who were convinced “We don’t have to worry, he will never pull this off,” later sink into a depressed funk.

Leading change means paying attention to the dispositions and energy within persons that drive their behaviors as they respond to change. Leaders who focus only on the behaviors of employees or community members may remain confused and their change efforts will be confounded. Leaders who can respond to the grief their people are experiencing with empathetic listening will enable the organization to actively engage the change that has begun.

To the Leaders:

A decision has been made; change is underway. If you have not already begun to listen to your people, there is no time to lose. Set up multiple opportunities for people to speak about what is happening. Listen in large and small groups; walk into individual offices and be clear that you are there to listen. Be prepared to encourage them to speak; they may need help to trust that you really want to hear them. Be prepared to hear and receive all the kinds of things people say when they are in the stages of grief. Some will be angry; some will try to talk you out of the position you hold. Say thank you for every piece of information you receive. Think about why, at this moment, you want and need to listen. The willingness to speak on the part of those who are feeling vulnerable is a precious gift. Let them see that you are also feeling vulnerable, and be vulnerable by hearing them with empathy. Listen into what they say for the meaning behind the words, for the essence of who they are that is being shared with you. Your listening affirms that these people are important enough to you and to this organization that you will receive them even when they may not be appearing “at their best.” Your listening honors their humanity. Your listening can free them to move through a difficult transition with grace.

Naming what is happening, whether it is an emotion, a stage of grief, or the meaning present in the situation, honors individuals’ experiences, assures people that they have been truly heard, and dissipates the power that negativity can have when it is hidden or suppressed. Naming can also be an opportunity to connect what leaders have heard to the wider situation; for example:

- It appears that many of you are acting as if this change is not going to happen. It is, and it is important that we come to terms with that fact so that we can move through this transition with as little distress as possible (Bridges, p. 29).

- We are all sad about what has happened, and I am aware of what you have personally given up.
- I hear your fear that we may lose what is essential; let’s clarify what is ending and what is not ending.
- It sounds as if you are trying to bargain your way out of this reality. Since this is our reality nonetheless, how might your creative energy be put toward the challenges this new reality will present to us?
- I understand that you feel angry, and that your feeling may linger for a while; and I know that you are angry because you care. I’m counting on you to continue to care for one another and for our common goals as we move forward.
- I have heard you identify many wishes and hopes today; let’s continue to talk about what we most need and how our hopes can best help us to serve our mission.

Leaders who listen and name experience as simply a technique to “quiet the troops,” without empathy, betray the human needs that they hear. The human brain is hard-wired for empathy, but two barriers to empathy can be difficult to overcome. First, many leaders have been trained to avoid feelings in all professional settings, so, initially, responding empathically may seem unprofessional. Secondly, empathy will inevitably provoke one’s own feelings, and it is impossible to be genuinely empathetic if one attempts to avoid his or her feelings. Empathy presumes a sincere desire to understand others and a willingness to heed the wisdom that Atticus Finch offers in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

“First of all,” he said, “If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—”
“Sir?”

“—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

The desire and willingness that fuel empathy will allow leaders to respond with compassion to the suffering that people experience as change gets underway.

EYES ON THE HORIZON

The organization has launched from a familiar harbor and is in the fast moving stream of change. The far shore is not visible. The more tumultuous the waters, the more the people are required to paddle blindly. In all organizational change there is some element of blindness, which can fall in a range of experience from not being able to visualize the outcome, to losing what had been the goal, to being caught completely unaware.

- The senior team at the distributorship has called a meeting with the managers to discuss how to proceed in the wake of the layoffs. While the CEO is discussing plans for a company-wide communications strategy, several managers are thinking, “I just don’t know where this is all going; I’d better get my resume ready.”
- Jim distributes the initial proposal for the new curriculum and schedule at the school faculty meeting. The logistics are organized, the financials look

promising, and workshops are scheduled to assist faculty with new teaching strategies. He is pleased that everything is progressing as planned, but as Jim leaves the meeting, he overhears murmurs from several faculty: "Until today, I thought I was a teacher"; "Why don't we have the courage to stick to what is right?"; "Money is driving everything around here."

When people are asked to let go of familiar territory, the courage and tenacity they need to keep moving are generated by the power of the vision that draws them, and "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18).

The immediate circumstances that provoke change, especially unanticipated or undesired change, rarely, if ever define the vision, and circumstances are unlikely to motivate those affected by the change. Knowing that the organization is losing money, for example, does not, in itself, inspire self-sacrifice and perseverance. Even the promise of a "land flowing with milk and honey" is not sufficient to sustain the Israelites through the desert. A vision that preserves and sustains people through change is one that responds to the deep human need for identity and purpose. The grumbling and bitterness in their journey ceases only upon receiving the vision of who they are and what they would become, which God directs Moses to communicate to them:

Thus you shall say to the House of Jacob; tell the Israelites: "You . . . shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exodus 19: 4-6).

A biblical perspective affirms that a sustaining vision is one in which individuals and the organization can hear a vocational call, that is, a vision that reveals the intersection of one's deep gladness and the world's deep hunger (Buechner, 1993, p. 119). The most compelling vision demonstrates that the organization and its mission serve a greater purpose, that in some way they protect human dignity and advance the common good. Such a vision sustains organizations because it ignites the human spirit by calling forth the divine Spirit dwelling within.

To the Leaders:

Despite the importance of vision, it may not be the first need you hear from your people. Imagine then, that your organization is featured on the new CBS primetime hit, Undercover Boss, and you have gone really undercover. Here is what you might hear in your people's conversations and in their hearts:

- *When I look at all the data from what has happened, it appears that we are headed in a direction that is a 90-degree turn from our mission. Why won't the president talk about his vision?*
- *We just need to know where we are going.*
- *"Everything will be better" is not a vision.*
- *I can do anything if I can believe in a shared vision and in the integrity of the ones who are leading us.*
- *I still believe that work should have meaning in our lives, but no one has asked what this change means to me.*
- *I am sixty years old, and I want to know that the years of service I have given to this company are not being erased in this change.*

- *I have asked again and again where this is all heading, but I just keep hearing, "Don't worry, no one else will lose their job."*

Like Moses, leaders are called to hold and articulate a vision, and to invite participation in its continued evolution. One simple approach that creates a bridge between immediate concerns and the broader vision is to transform the question, "Why are we doing this?" into "What will this action make possible?" The "why" question often spirals into narrow and futile concerns, for example,

- "Why are we laying off four people?"
- "Because we are facing financial shortfalls."
- "Why are we facing financial shortfalls?"
- "Because. . . ."

This line of inquiry can quickly lead to detours and dead-ends: hyper-analysis, criticism or blame. While every situation includes problems that need to be addressed, the question of "possibility" leads to wider horizons and greater hope:

- "What will laying off four people make possible?"
- "Funds that can balance the budget and relieve anxiety; a reorganization of roles."
- "Yes, and the reorganization may be challenging, but what will it make possible?"
- "Employees may re-examine their skills and try a new position."
- "And what might that make possible?"
- "I might present that new project idea I've been mulling over."

Leaders who understand that vision is a deep human need understand that questions about vocation and identity will neither stall the change process nor disrupt the work that needs to be done. The experience of blindness inherent in change is what can lead to paralysis. Conversations that bring a clear and compelling vision into view enable the organization to move with alacrity toward a common horizon.

IN OPEN WATERS

Between what an organization has left behind and its future vision lie the swirling eddies and currents of transition. Bridges calls it the *neutral zone*, "because it is a nowhere between two somewheres, and because while you are in it, forward motion seems to stop while you hang suspended between what was and what will be" (p. 40). Employees are expected to continue the daily work of the organization, the work that is actually accomplishing the change, even though structures, roles and tasks are in flux, no one has clear answers, and their course is not clearly charted.

- A manager at the distributorship is called in by the CEO because several complaints have come in from retailers in the company's territory. After being dressed down, the manager calls his sales team together to find out what's going on. He tries to keep his cool when they are not repentant but angry; he hears a litany of their complaints about trying to manage all the accounts that were left open by the layoffs.

- A faculty member at the school comes into Jim's office shaking a set of papers at him. She says, with low intensity, "I have received four different schedules and my log-in and password won't work and I can't get online, and how can I possibly teach when I don't even know what I am doing?" He says, "Why don't you sit down," and she bursts into tears.

Research shows that organizations in the midst of the ambiguities of change are likely to experience rising anxiety and falling motivation, low productivity and absenteeism, re-emergence of old weaknesses—in processes or personalities, work overload, confused priorities and polarization (Bridges, pp. 40-41). In the frustrations and disappointments of the rough waters of change, some leaders imagine that they are being asked to conjure magic that will calm the waters and relieve the discomforts that people are feeling. Left unchecked, the belief that they should do the impossible results in feelings of bitterness and a tendency to blame their people when difficulties arise. The task of leaders is not miracles but empowerment.

Empowerment may also be misconstrued as leaders giving power to their people. As spiritual beings, all people have the power that they need—the indwelling of the Spirit. The leaders' role is to help them find that center of gravity by calling forth their gifts and connecting their daily efforts to the shared vision. In the open waters of change, leaders are like wilderness guides, keeping the group oriented on the journey. To stay oriented and to use their power effectively people need simple but essential guidance from leaders: to know where they are as individuals and as an organization along the journey; to read the signs that keep them moving safely in the right direction; to understand how they will be able to meet the expectations leaders have of them.

To the Leaders:

The turbulent waters of change require many crucial conversations. Your work to find your own center of gravity, to know yourself and your power, will generate the confidence, trust and perseverance you need to be able to:

- *Name people's gifts when they can't see them.*
- *Chart the territory, giving people snapshots of the vision: "What you have been telling me about our situation;" "Where I believe we are today;" "How far we have come from last month;" "Where I believe we could be in six months."*
- *Ask people what they need.*

- *Use your strategic capabilities to assist people to decide how to manage different or increased work responsibilities, to help them prioritize, to find their center when they seem to be flailing.*
- *Tell people, again and again . . . and again, that they matter to you and to the organization because of who they are and what they bring, and not as a commodity or a means to an end.*
- *Connect the dots between their daily work and the mission and the vision.*
- *Build trust—the community after the change is not the same as the community before the change; people may need to learn how to work together in new ways.*
- *Have the love and faith in your people to hold them accountable for their performance and behaviors, providing necessary boundaries.*
- *Express your gratitude and reflect people's value back to them, even when they are lost, angry, resistant or when they decide that they need to move on from the organization.*
- *Ask for feedback on how you are doing as you lead through this period, and listen for the truth of what you might need to adjust to be agile and responsive to this new situation.*

Like expert river guides, effective change leaders' gaze shifts continuously from the vision of the destination to the waters immediately surrounding the boat, while keeping their eyes on their people. What do they need to keep paddling? Where are they likely to flounder because they can't match their old skills to the new reality? What could cause doubts and hesitation that may paralyze or demoralize them just when decisive action and positive attitude are most needed? The human vulnerability apparent in this phase of change, amplified in our contemporary milieu of permanent whitewater, accentuates the need for leaders who have courage, personal maturity and great integrity.

THE CHANGE LEADER AS GYROSCOPE

Each phase of the journey invites change leaders to be like the gyroscopes of old that guided the tall ships across the oceans. They are called to hold the paradox of stillness within a constantly moving system providing a point of stability and equilibrium to their organizations. As the organization leaves a safe harbor, and experiences the loss that initiates all transition, the leader steadies the group by accepting people's feelings and





gy•ro•scope
[jahy-ruh-skohp]
-noun

an apparatus consisting of a rotating wheel so mounted that its axis can turn freely in certain or all directions, and capable of maintaining the same absolute direction in space in spite of movements of the mountings and surrounding parts: used to maintain equilibrium, determine direction, etc. (Dictionary.com Unabridged. Website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gyroscope>)

offering compassion. The leaders' articulation of a compelling vision steadies the group both by indicating the horizon toward which they are traveling, and by drawing forth what makes work meaningful in people's lives. Finally, the leader steadies the group by orienting them through the journey so that they can realize their gifts and use their power effectively.

It goes without saying that communication is essential to all three phases of change, and "it goes without saying," is often the problem. The information and messages that people need to hear in order to navigate change cannot "go without saying," but leaders frequently imagine that their people already understand what, in fact, they really need to hear. It is not uncommon for leaders to make surprised and sometimes defensive statements like: "You know what our mission is;" "We all have a shared vision;" "Of course we value our employees;" "They know my door is always open," leaving the employees to scratch their heads and mutter, "They just don't get it." It is impossible to overstate the importance of continuous communication in the midst of change.

Good communication reminds leaders and employees that they are in the boat together united on a common journey, and it points to a deeper reality: the communion we share as human beings in whom the Spirit dwells. Compassionate, coherent and courageous communication conveys the profoundly simple message, "I am with you," which echoes God's own promise. When leaders attend to critical human needs, and convey a message of presence and communion, they enable the organization to realize in its midst the presence of God. Whether change is unanticipated and unwanted, or an enthusiastically chosen innovation, God, our true "repose in change," is the source of stability that endures.

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Principled Leadership: **THINK NEEDS**

Sister Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J.
Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T.

If your actions inspire others to dream more, to learn more, to do more and to be more than they are, then you are a leader.

John Quincy Adams

Leadership is multi-dimensional, an amalgam of many different components. In many ways effective leadership could be compared to being a good chef, knowing the right amounts of spices and ingredients necessary to create a *piece de resistance*. Effective Christian leadership requires a balanced mixture of spirituality, skill, positive relationship, unique qualities, sound theory, and, perhaps, even a dash of charisma. However, what cannot be overlooked is that effective leaders function from a reservoir of leadership principles. These principles are what guide and give direction to leaders. One such principle is "think needs."

THINK NEEDS

Human behavior often has its origin in addressing and meeting human needs. If you wish to understand a person or group's behavior, it is important to consider what human needs are being

met by that behavior. Accepting this leadership principle helps to make sense out of your own and others' seemingly erratic behavior.

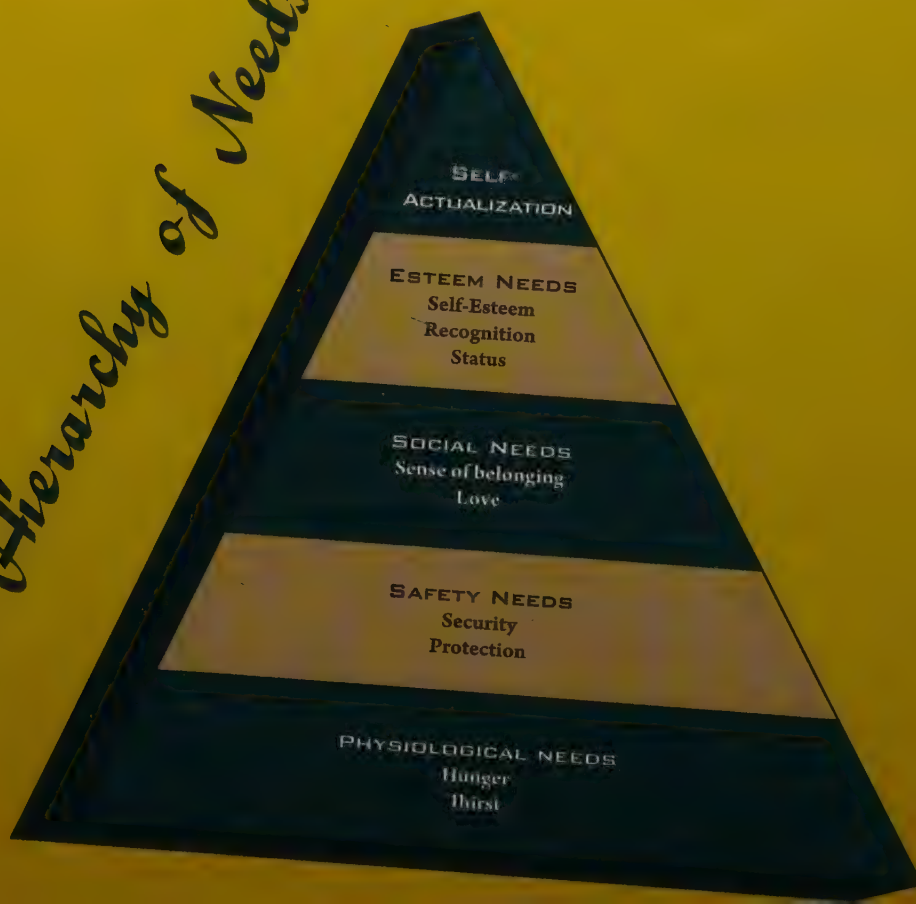
Needs are something that God places in human beings to propel them toward wholeness and holiness. They are internal drives that motivate individuals toward growth. Needs are more than just desires. An individual might desire to develop a deep personal relationship with a particular individual. That might never occur, and the person would continue to function and grow. In contrast, it would be a serious psychological deprivation to be totally isolated and alienated from all human beings. There is a basic human need to belong. When needs are not satisfied, people become sick and die. That death could be spiritual, physical, and/or emotional. As noted psychologist Abraham Maslow asserted, human beings have a limited number of needs, such as the need to survive, to maintain safety and security, to belong, to be loved, and to maintain one's self-esteem. These basic needs, though few, are powerful motivators.

When you think of needs, consider the side of a breakfast cereal box that

lists the daily minimum requirements of things which are essential for the body, such as specific vitamins. Needs are like those daily minimum requirements. It is essential for each individual to have their basic needs met or they will not survive or grow.

Behaviors that seem erratic, illogical, or self-defeating can be understood only when one accepts that at some level these behaviors are meeting human needs. This drive-oriented mechanism is usually unconscious. When you observe behavior that defies any logical explanation, contemplate what need the behavior might be meeting in the other person. For example, might the behavior be meeting the need to feel safe and secure or the need to feel good about oneself or protect oneself from rejection? Often, the normal reaction for many people, including leaders, when confronted with erratic behavior is to react rather than respond in a helpful way. The challenge is not only to refrain from reacting, but, more importantly, to move to the level of cognition and try to understand the need that produced the behavior. It is this cognitive leap that often provides the opportunity to

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



make better leadership decisions and, ultimately, to make a helpful response to one other.

It is essential for leaders to operate from a basic understanding of human needs as motivating drives. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one helpful model for identifying these. There are certainly other models, but the key is to embrace some model and utilize it when examining behaviors in light of needs.

Life would be relatively simple if each action caused a consistent and predictable reaction. However, this is not the case. People are not laboratory experiments. It is impossible to predict the cause of a particular behavior simply by observing the reaction. Behavior is multi-causal and, although we see similar behavior in a number of individuals, the behavior may be meeting different needs in each individual.

For instance, you observe someone who is extremely controlling. There is no way to accurately predict what causes the controlling behavior. The single observable behavior of control might be caused by any of the following: a threat to self-esteem, fear, greed, lack of psychosocial development, or any one of a number of other causes.

It could also be caused by a combination of these factors. One of the behaviors that is frequently misinterpreted is silence. Some presume that they can almost miraculously intuit the cause of the silence. In reality a number of emotions might produce silence, such as fright, fear, awe, confusion, boredom or a myriad of other possibilities. All we see is the behavior. The cause lies beyond our observable perceptions, but it has its genesis in needs.

Just as behavior is multi-causal, so also one cannot accurately predict resultant behavior based on knowledge of the cause. Effective leaders learn that, even when they know the cause, they cannot with any consistent accuracy predict what the response will be. A person who is threatened might react in a number of different ways: withdrawal, aggression, arrogance, defensiveness, submissivity, humorously, etc. Human behavior is complex and does not lend itself to overly simplistic rules.

Effective leaders are those who understand the complexity of needs and do not presume they can discern the cause based on the behavior, nor predict

what behavior will ensue based on a specific cause. Often what interferes with acceptance of the multi-dimensions of cause and behavior is excessive dependency on one's experience; "I remember seeing this same situation in my last (parish, committee, classroom, organization, etc). I remember that the cause was. . . . I took this action and it worked. Therefore, I'll do the same thing again." Each situation is unique, involving different people, circumstances and needs and requires responses that are discerned in light of those realities. The secret is to always think "multi" and avoid making simplistic conclusions based on past experiences.

A Negative Example

A young woman sat next to us on a flight. She was nasty to all the cabin staff, and we found ourselves negatively judging and labeling her. We tried our best to avoid her, which is perfectly acceptable behavior on an airplane flight. Each of us withdrew into some reading material, attempting to avoid her as much as possible. About thirty minutes into the flight, she turned toward us with a smile and declared, "Now I feel comfortable!" She explained that she had a terror of flying and the behavior we observed was a reaction to that terror. Her need was to feel safe. Her behavior was merely a manifestation of that need. We had judged her by her behavior and failed to perceive her behavior as merely an expression of a need.

A Positive Example

I worked with youth in an after-school program. One of the group workers sent a thirteen-year-old girl to see me. The worker said that she was behaving in a very aggressive way toward the other girls in the group. It was my responsibility "to solve" this problem. At the time I was absorbed with some other problems. My immediate reaction was to send this teenager home and tell her she could come back when she had learned how to behave—clearly a reaction. Rather, I allowed God's grace to intervene and, instead of sending her home, asked her if she had eaten lunch—a potentially helpful response. She informed me that she didn't like the "slop" they served at

school. I then asked what she had for breakfast. She replied, "I never eat breakfast." Suddenly aware that I was absorbed in a reactive mode, I shifted gears and inquired when she had last eaten. She began crying. As the tears began to dissipate she told me that they had no food at home nor enough money to pay for her school lunch. She hadn't eaten in three days. Only then did I realize that she was deprived of having a most important need met—food. She was hungry. It was this hunger that produced her behavior.

STOP AND THINK

- Recall a time when others were confused by your behavior. Are you aware, now, of what needs you may have been trying to address by that behavior?
- Consider the behavior of another that you have found inexplicable. Think needs. What need might have influenced that behavior?
- Are there times when you have found yourself prematurely judging someone based on their behavior, rather than to think needs?



Sister Carroll Juliano, S.H.C.J., and Brother Loughlan Sofield, S.T., have co-authored numerous books. Their most recent, *Principled Ministry: A Guidebook for Catholic Church Leaders*, is published by Ave Maria Press.



HOW TO WELCOME VICISS

The early Greek philosophers, the pre-Socratics, looked for a principle that explains everything. The best known of these is Heraclitus, for his conviction that everything is flowing, all is in flux—*Panta rei*. He observed continual change and conceived of reality as a stream of transitory conditions. So did the author known as Ecclesiastes, who concluded that “all is vanity and a chase after wind” (1:14). This Jewish sage did believe in God and taught, famously, that “there is an appointed time for everything” (3:1), urging us to make the most of good times. But he warns pessimistically that, in the last analysis, our strengths do not prevail. Whatever valor, wisdom or riches we can marshal, “a time of calamity comes to all alike” (9:11). Ecclesiastes provides some mighty reasons to fear change!

Consider the universe. The ancients, including the Greeks before Heraclitus, looked at the starry realm as permanent and unchanging, the sphere of the ideal. We know it now as explosive, breakneck in speed, unthinkable in its gravitational pulls and destructions. A very helpful book, *The Universe Story*, by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry (1994), paints the big picture in awesome terms. They see the universe, with its 100 billion galaxies, as a living, dynamic unit being guided from the very start toward greater complexity through violent, spectacular changes—including at least four annihilations of life on earth. They find these governing themes at work—that beings differentiate due to mutation, that they act instinctively to their own benefit, that they must be in communion somehow with their environment. In this view change is a principal actor, often at immense cost, as in revolutions, but for an eventual good.

Change is thus inevitable, often with mixed benefits. My father, who was born in 1888, used to say, “You cannot imagine the changes I have seen in my lifetime.” By that he meant radio,

autos, air travel, inoculations, refrigeration. He died in 1967. Since then we have been blessed with computers, lasers, heart surgery, cell phones, genetic screening. In the world of electronics, month-by-month change can be dizzying. Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden* back in 1854, inveighed against “modern improvements,” with the outcry, “Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!” What a voice crying in the wilderness today!

Our old Latin vocabulary has a couple of choice words for the ups and downs of daily life and its cycle of changes. The first of these is *varietas*—not just variety as we welcome it in the local supermarket but the changeability of things. The second is *vicissitudo*, which appears in English as *vicissitude*, unpredictable and unpleasant change, a trial to be gone through. In Latin *vicissitudo* also meant a natural process of alternation, diverse outcomes succeeding one another as with night and day. Shakespeare summed up the changeability of things with the medieval image of “fortune’s fickle wheel” (Henry V, 3:vi:28).

The contemporary world, in politics, in morés, in business and industry is morphing constantly. This affects the working force, personal finances, the line of products, the exposés of the media. Psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton spent decades probing the crisis of identity in a fast-changing world. His conclusions appear in *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (1993). Lifton admired Proteus, the great shape-shifter of mythology, for his endless flexibility and adaptability. He thought that in our age, under the impact of overwhelming events, each individual “has been evolving a sense of self appropriate to the restlessness and flux of our time.” He judged America to be a protean nation, a nomad people, always beginning anew. He would no doubt have approved the words of Anthony de Mello, S.J.: “On the day you cease to change you cease to live.”

DE

James Torrens, S.J.

The world as we experience it is being modified daily, and often not so subtly. As individuals too we have to absorb some violent shocks to the system. Job loss, romantic failures, fear of the streets, the death of intimates—these enter the fabric of so many lives. And how about uprooting from a favored place, or parish, or community? How about unwanted assignments or serious illness? Some people never recover from such events. Many more today just find themselves embattled against the shape of the modern world.

Grace and the guidance of the Spirit, thank the Lord, are nonetheless still very much at work, helping people eventually regard their injuries, sudden illness, rejection or disapproval as events of watershed importance in their lives. It has helped them to a sense of what and who should really matter. It has allowed them to find solid ground on a tremulous planet. It has led them, finally, to grasp what St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (8:28).

To sum up. Without a stable footing, some grounding of our welfare in the great Shaper and Guide, we have every reason to flinch from change. With such grounding, this unsettling phenomenon can take its intended place in the adventure we call life.



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RINGING THE CHANGES

**Let today be dizzy, if it must.
You keep your feet.**

**The unexpected can egg you on,
or it can flummox you.**

**Next time don't be surprised,
though you can be appalled.**

**When I ignore the body's changes,
evidence piles up.**

**Windmills obey a breath of air,
do so to the Spirit.**

**Were we happy with how it was?
Why not with how it will be?**

**The universe does not like a rut.
Stability it likes. Go figure.**

CHANGE AND RESILIENCE IN THE

Brother Patrick



AND NOW

, C.F.C., Ph.D.

Change is big. It encompasses every moment of life from birth through death. To get a hold on the topic I propose the image of standing at a threshold. Be it the entrance to the garden of paradise, the door frame of a slaves' hovel in Egypt, a mother's womb, a triumphal arch, a tunnel of suffering, the opening to the Holy of Holies, even the gates of heaven or hell, our traditions, our lives, our stories are marked by a series of passages from then to now, involving closure, re-initiation and some degree of resilience. We are ever at the threshold of another change.

Change occurs in a context of continuity. When individuals undergo change, there are aspects of their being that do not change. That which persists is described as resilient. Materials, thoughts, ideals, individuals and even infections are said to be "resilient" to the extent they endure in times of change.

To give an illustration of resilience, let me begin with John. The troubled sixteen-year-old had been coming faithfully for counseling sessions to address growth and adjustment issues. The school principal advised the counselor that the afternoon session might be particularly challenging. John's closest friends had been killed the previous night in a tragic accident.

Perhaps discerning the added concern in his counselor's "So, John, how's it going?," the boy responded, "You heard. Don't worry. I knew what to do." He went on to report that in the days before the accident his religion teacher had presented a unit on death and dying explaining the Kübler-Ross stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. "As soon as I heard, I did each one. It took about an hour, and then I was OK."

The mental constructs we derive from an analysis of ongoing experiences,

while not quite as magical as John might have believed, can be useful to the individual in communicating complex emotional experiences to self and others. To repeat, change is big. The whole is not the sum of the parts; nevertheless, a few "folders" are useful in an initial sorting of whatever might be presenting itself as individuals encounter altered realities.

Change can be studied historically as stages involving the time before the change, the time after the change and whatever occurred in between that made a difference. The approach I am proposing, on the other hand, focuses on a single moment of personal engagement.

Consider three very broad aspects of change: closure with respect to that which was, re-invention with respect to that which will be, and resilience with respect to that which persists. The perspective intended is the contemporaneous psychological state of the individual experiencing change. It is the past, not as it was, nor the future, as it will be, but rather the psychological past and the psychological future as cognitively and/or affectively present to the individual here and now to which we need to pay attention.

The *here and now* have particular significance for educators, counselors, therapists and spiritual directors. Our professional literature speaks of engagement, attention, corrective emotional experience, re-living the trauma. We focus on the present moment. Some explain our *modus operandi* as ever seeking the point where the rubber hits the road.

When the request for this article arrived, our school art gallery was featuring the work of an alum, a very

accomplished Haitian American photographer, Carl Juste. The *Miami Herald* had sent him on one of the first medical emergency planes landing in Port-au-Prince the day after the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti. His photo journalism brought Miami and the rest of the world to an island of devastation, loss and incredible suffering. Carl joined in the search for life in the rubble, in the improvised operating tents, and on the streets. While committed to seeing whatever was present, his identification with victims evoked in him need to find images that would permit his people and himself to hope in a better tomorrow. He has gathered the images in a powerful collection entitled: *Invictus: Haiti Unconquered*.

With the permission of the artist and the collaboration of the editors of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, three of these pictures will serve as icons for the folders on closure, re-invention and resilience, respectively: *Sacred Ruins*, *First Step*, and *Leg Up*.

The photographer provided the following captions:

***Sacred Ruins* (at right):** The Church of Sacre Coeur in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, once an expression of faith, tradition and solidity, is heavily damaged by the January 12th earthquake. While Canadian search and rescue squads continued the work of recovering the dead, members of the congregation held a memorial service. The statue of Jesus on the Cross remains intact for all passers-by to see.

***First Step* (p. 45):** A tent serves as an emergency ward for people who have lost one or more limbs in the January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Their expressions suggest vicarious engagement as two of the amputees take faltering steps on newly fitted prostheses a few weeks after their surgeries.

***Leg Up* (p. 46):** Wilfred Macena, 25, welder, mechanic, and part-time soccer coach, was a quick learner. He started

walking with his prosthetic leg within an hour after being fitted. The athletic Macena practices using his new leg in workouts with a soccer ball. Here he lays aside his prosthesis to playfully and skillfully execute a hand stand raising up to the heavens his surviving leg.

Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Carl Juste, March 2010
Iris Photo Collective:
<http://irisphotocollective.com/>

CLOSURE AMIDST "SACRED RUINS"

The Kübler-Ross stages of death and dying, which proved so magical for the challenged teen mentioned above, have served well in the process of introducing counselors in training to the topic of closure.

The descriptors of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance provide a useful vocabulary for acknowledging and sharing emotional

experiences of separation. Guided individually and then in groups through a retrospective examination of how they say goodbye, the prospective counselors seek to articulate the ways they have dealt with changes.

A baby alters the sibling constellation, the family relocates to a new neighborhood, friends move away, family members get sick and die. Couples separate, divorce. Scholastic promotion requires a change of schools. Leaving home, taking on a new job, accepting responsibility, challenge, defeat and success, deciding to be a counselor—their lives have been filled with change, both those they have initiated and those which have been imposed by external circumstances.



Change evokes a great variety of responses. Some say their farewells with apparent ease and move on quickly, others linger, some never let go. Counselors are encouraged to identify their personal style of establishing closure. Some protest that each time has been different. Peers are often more astute in picking up a pattern. It is essential that the counselors come to insight about how their personal styles of attaining closure might differ from those of others, particularly those of their prospective clients.

Early in the development of a counseling relationship, counselors are advised that the agenda for supervision will include consideration of how the counseling work will come to conclusion. They are asked to hypothesize how the client may need to move beyond the "sacred ruins" of their past to embrace a new tomorrow. The



counselors will be asked to consider their own affective response to separation from the client. What will both need to bring the shared project of counseling and being counseled to a mutually acceptable termination?

RE-INITIATION AS A "FIRST STEP"

Birth and living can be examined from the vantage points suggested for death and dying. Attempts at new beginnings may evoke renewed expressions of denial, anger, bargaining and depression moderating the acceptance of altered paths to a chosen future.

Gordon Allport in his 1955 classic publication *Becoming* questioned the then-prevalent focus on histories of external reinforcement as an explanation of human behavior. He protested that psychologists were following people into their past while they were living their lives into the future. At issue was and is the role of personal agency in effecting change in our lives. Are we simply addressing derived needs or do intention and purpose better explain our actions?

Re-initiation, following an undesired separation or a devastating loss, will often require extraordinary powers of volition. Purpose, self-image, a sense of competency, hope of success and fear

of failure can come into play as the individual considers launching a new beginning.

The study of psychology thrives on insights that challenge established modes of understanding the human endeavor. Sometimes a researcher will resurrect theories and approaches forgotten or abandoned in previous eras. The latter has been the case for Daniel Pink on the issue of human motivation. His *New York Times* best-seller entitled *Drive* addresses issues fueled by concern over failures in the economy and in the public schools of the United States. Reacting to carrot and stick techniques of reinforcement, he dips back into the Harry Harlow primate studies of the 1950s, reviews the work of Edmund Deci in the 1970s, and explores the power of intrinsic motivation.

Harlow's monkeys learned and performed complicated tasks without receiving external rewards. The challenge of solving a puzzle seemed to be the motivating factor. Deci and others saw in the experience of personal competency a powerful source of intrinsic motivation.

Again, the preparation of counselors suggests ways of attending to a first step toward tomorrow. In the initial session they are encouraged to discern answers to four questions about the individual seeking counseling:

Why has the individual come?
Why now? What does he or she
hope to achieve? How does he
or she believe it will happen?

Answers are suggested by the more stable aspects of the individual's life—that which has persisted, developed and been refined through a long series of life changes.

RESILIENCE AS A “LEG UP” ON SURVIVAL

In the closing decades of the last millennium, children and adolescents escaping from war-torn and impoverished parts of the globe brought counselors and child-care workers into contact with remarkable stories of resilience. As the professionals listened and shared observations, themes emerged suggesting how these youngsters survived events that cost the lives of so many others. Stefan Vanistendael suggested a “casita,” a little house, as a depository for the various clusters of observations that were emerging. A variation on his approach was introduced to *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* readers in the 2010 summer edition. Issues of purpose and belonging are assigned to two rooms on the ground floor. Above them are two rooms dedicated to aspects of self-esteem and of agency. A fifth room, an attic, accommodates humor and other forms of affective and imaginative manifestations of the human spirit.

The very modest “casita of resilience” was not intended as a psychological model, but rather as a device for sorting recurring aspects of the children's stories. The positioning of the rooms, however, does suggest some relationship between the various themes. Purpose and belonging are foundational. They support the self-esteem and agency on the floor above. The attic offers protection for all that is below. Change in any room of the house may evoke commotion and possibly concurrent change in other rooms.

During the years that the children's resilience data were being processed, I



was on the short list of English speaking psychologists in Rome. As such I was afforded the privilege of accompanying a number of adults: the clinical/pastoral staffs of renewal programs for middle-aged religious and returning missionaries; newly elected members of leadership teams of religious congregations as they adjusted to each other in their new roles and confronted

the mandates for change from a recent chapter; seminarians facing the garden variety of vocational, affective and sexuality issues in the rarified context of the Eternal City far from peers and family. The unifying issue was change. The vocabulary emerging from the resilience studies provided a useful tool for sorting the various themes emerging as individuals and groups, as well as

ose who accompanied them, dis-
rned next steps.

The children and adolescents
hose stories suggested the casita of
silience were the survivors. Could it be
at those who did not finish, or even
art the journey, would have produced
ories that lacked purpose, belonging,
lf-esteem, agency or a sense of humor?
n intuitive acceptance of such conclu-
ons invites verification—conveniently
eyond the scope of the current
ticle! I am suggesting opposing poles
a continuum to help define the cate-
ories: purpose vs. purposelessness,
belonging vs. alienation, self-esteem vs.
self-denigration, agency vs. passivity
and humor vs. rigidity.

PURPOSE VS. PURPOSELESSNESS

As individuals recount their stories
e maintain sensitivity to how changes
circumstances might be impacting
eir sense of purpose in life, here and
ow.

Resounding success results in
promotion. Failure results in
being fired. The salesperson
becomes a supervisor, the
teacher a vice principal, the
firefighter a chief. The leading
lady takes on a supporting role;
the quarterback becomes a
coach; the parish priest moves
into a diocesan office; the supe-
rior general moves back into
the ranks. The children leave
the nest; mother and father find
themselves simply husband
and wife. Adult children return.
Religious leave their communi-
ties; priests are laicized; long
term civil servants are not re-
elected; missionaries return to
their country of origin. A senior
loses driving privileges; the
doctor becomes a patient; the
amputee must learn to walk
again.

The purpose that made past
tions meaningful might not find
pression in a domain of new expecta-
ons. Change often calls for a redefini-

tion of immediate and long term goals
and objectives. The capacity and will-
ingness of individuals to examine and re-
define the whys of life will impact much
of what they do today and tomorrow,
including their letting go of yesterday.

BELONGING VS. ALIENATION

A change of address, of school, of
work, of assignment often involves a
moving away from significant others in
our lives. Counselors are attuned to the
use of the first person plural.

Who are the "we" in the lives of
their clients? How have moves
impacted their sense of belong-
ing within their families, their
local communities, their social
groupings, their coworkers?

Openness to forming new relation-
ships can be traced to primary forms of
bonding with mother, father, siblings.
Distance may alter communication, one
of the life sources for relationships. New
roles may define new reference groups
and create obstacles to former associations.

Family of origin, ethnic group,
faith formation, extended fami-
ly, chosen communities,
schooling, political engage-
ment, occupation and profes-
sion, achievements and failures,
addictions and liberations,
abilities and disabilities—all
offer possibilities of a sense of
belonging within reference
groups.

Membership does not necessitate
adherence or affective affiliation.

I may be dynamically engaged
in my faith community while
minimally concerned about
church policy and structures;
passionately patriotic yet
unmoved by party politics;
faithfully devoted to my imme-
diate family yet uninvolved in
the affairs of the extended fami-
ly. Marketing and advancement
specialists work at evoking loy-
alty to the university or prep
school Alma Mater, to a com-

munity action group, or to a
charitable cause.

Causes may be embraced with a
deep sense of belonging. As popular
spiritualities rediscover Pierre Teilhard
de Chardin, belonging takes on
cosmic dimensions. In her day Simone
Weil asked: "How can Christianity
call itself catholic if the universe itself
is left out?"

An elderly woman wrote to the
founder of the Boys' Towns of Italy: "I
do not know what I would have done
had your children not been a part of my
life." Her sense of belonging and partici-
pation far exceeded her observable
involvement, an annual Christmas card
containing a contribution of ten dollars
and a request for prayers.

SELF-ESTEEM VS. SELF-DENIGRATION AND AGENCY VS. PASSIVITY

The individual reflecting on
experiences of belonging and of purpose
adds definition to his or her "self."

I am a man, a family member,
a Catholic, a professional. I
seek to do good, to know, to
love, to serve. I value what I do,
who I am, and who I am
becoming. I have self-esteem. I
own my behavior. In various
situations I have varying
degrees of willfulness and
freedom. Occasionally I am
already acquiescing to what I
cannot control; nevertheless, I
am conscious of having a role
in whatever is happening in my
life. I am an agent.

Self-esteem and agency are
assigned to the second floor of the
casita. They are private domains. The
friend, counselor or spiritual director
granted access is on holy ground.

Change, any change, reverberates
in these chambers. Loss or failure,
success or promotion can augment or
diminish confidence with respect to
both who I am and my sense of what I
am capable of doing.

What do they want of me now?
Who is with me now? This feels
so strange! Do I really deserve
this? Now that I have attained
this level, so much more is
expected. If only I could take a
step back.

Discipleship and commitment to a religious group will introduce interesting dimensions of purpose and belonging with a concomitant impact on self-esteem and agency. Identification with Christ and the embrace of a shared mission evoke expressions of self-definition and personal agency at the service of a larger vision. Faith, prayer, trust and reliance on divine intervention become significant components of drive and personal motivation. Words from the letters of St. Paul and the Gospels can work their way into the discourse.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. When I am weak, then I am strong. Ask, and you shall receive. Where one or two are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them. Fear not, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.

HUMOR VS. RIGIDITY

The attic of the casita can be a repository of experience and a laboratory of invention. It is the zone of what, in Italian, might be termed the "spiritoso." In resilience studies, the survivors' sense of humor was an indicator of buoyancy, a certain affective flexibility and lack of rigidity in confronting stress. The stories were rich in emotional content. Venting of humor, passion, anxiety, anger, depression, playfulness, frustration and exhilaration suggested some of what the attic accommodates. Here logic stammers. Right-brain activity prevails with traces of what some attribute to the energies of id, superego, collective unconscious and archetypes, or the residue of repression, denial, sublimation, primal urges, dreams, psychoses, hallucinations and mystic experiences.

In the body or out of the body,
I do not know. God knows (2
Corinthians 12:2).

Change that is denied or resisted may require venting. There are notable differences in the space individuals allot to such expression. The counseling relationship offers an alternative space within which the client can explore the reverberations of change. The presence of a trusted companion may render that space a safe zone for a corrective emotional experience. Professionals will be sensitive to revelations that approach the confines of their competency when counseling, or when acting as a spiritual director they are stretched into areas requiring other levels of intervention.

WAITING IN THE THRESHOLD

While re-invention and a first step are expressions of new life, there is the possibility that the moment between what was and what will be, the threshold itself, holds a treasure that will be missed with too rapid a change.

At the entrance of the cave on Mount Horeb, Elijah witnessed three manifestations of the power of God before encountering the Lord in the gentle breeze. Waiting for God is a recurring theme of the masters of the spiritual life.

St. Teresa of Avila advises her sisters "*La paciencia todo lo alcanza*," patient endurance attains all things. Blessed Edmund Rice encouraged his brothers, "All in God's time." Simone Weil, toward the end of her life, attended daily Mass, yet resisted baptism. In *Waiting for God* she writes:

If I had my eternal salvation placed in front of me on this table, and if I only had to stretch out my hand to take it, I would not put out my hand so long as I had not received the order to do so. At least that is what I like to think.

Jesus, too, awaited his hour.

Even in our most contemplative moments Americans have a propensity for progress through action. Thomas

Merton testified to joy in the journey. Dorothy Day delighted in St. Catherine of Sienna's insight: *All the way to heaven is heaven because Jesus said, "I am the way."* I'm attracted to the image of the walking hitch hiker, proceeding on foot even as the thumb is out hoping for a faster passage to the desired destination. But then again, just standing on the threshold of change, contemplating the fullness of the present moment, may be the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord.

A still shot of Calvary, with Jesus suspended between earth and heaven, captioned: *It is consummated*, has been for generations of Christians the enduring sign of change, the threshold of new life, *now and at the hour of our death*.

RECOMMENDED READING

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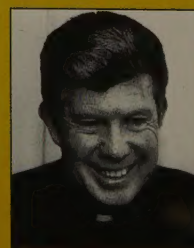
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VIEW

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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John Navone, S.J.

Narcissism in the Spiritual Life

Paul D Marceau

Healthy Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D. and Jonathan J. Sperry, Ph.D.

Feeling with God: Participation in Incarnation

Allan Schnarr, Ph.D.



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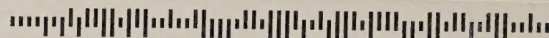
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